MARVEL
THE
MARVEL® ART
OF MARKO
DJURDJEVIC

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Special thanks to Chris Allo, Jelena Kevic Djurdjevic, Joe Quesada, and Warren Simons

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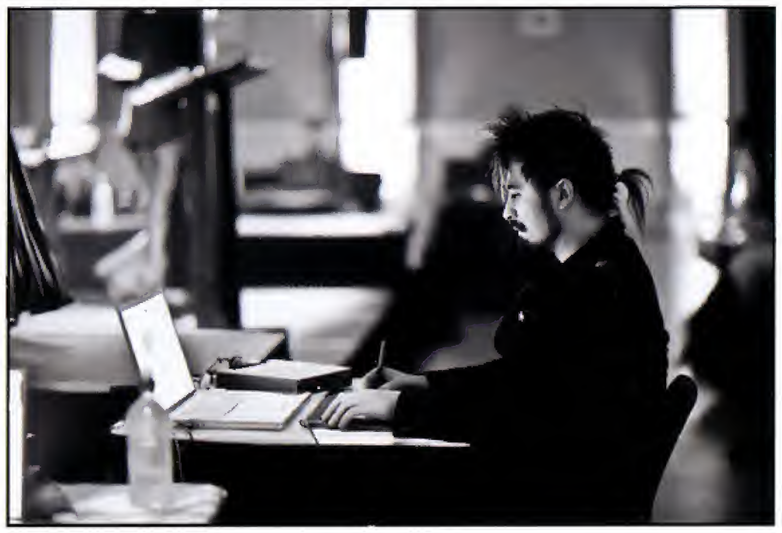

Marko Djurdjevic

■ FOREWORD

Marko Djurdjevic is an art chainsaw of skull-ripping, bone-shredding, self-taught talent. He is an enigma who carved his life and his work as he dreamed it to be. Over the past ten years, Marko has sharpened his skills through hard fought personal battles, countless hours at the grindstone, and has overcome severe adversity to become one of the top entertainment illustrators and designers on the planet.

Marko is a visual storyteller capable of building rich worlds for his clients and inspiring millions of artists and art lovers alike with his works. He is a man who believes in self-improvement, learning, and sharing with others. Marko is more than just an artist. He is a good man, a family man, and is a worldly soul full of experience and emotional depth. When I see his works, I see greatness. When I am fortunate to spend time with him, I see a true friend.

Over the past six years, Marko has contributed to many of the biggest entertainment projects around. He has worked on comics, films, games, toys, and new media with a fervor. He has become an esteemed teacher who gives back all the information he fought so hard to learn during his life, sharing his theories with artists all over the world. His work has progressed from primarily pencil work to the mastery of digital and a variety of traditional medias.

Some artists have it easy. Marko did not. No one handed him an art education. No one handed him his career. Marko earned it all – from sheer desire, perseverance, deep passion, and countless hours of practice.

As you turn the pages of this incredible body of work, it may not be obvious that Marko is really only just beginning his journey as an artist. After years of struggle and both creative and personal victories, his skill set is complete. Through the next decade there will be much more to come, without a doubt. The impact he has had on the world of entertainment art is inspirational. The waves he will create over the coming years will be immense. Rest assured, this will not be the last art book that comes from this man's soul and deft fingers.

Marko's works are powerful, virtuosic, and rich in imagination. If you look deep enough into these pages, you will see the same thing I see – an artist of immeasurable heart, perseverance, humor, intense work ethic, wisdom, integrity, and deep creativity. If you truly listen, works of art say more than just a narrative message, they speak directly to the soul of the artist. Within this book I think you will find, as I did when I first discovered his art years ago, that his art speaks for itself. Work like this reveals more than just a beautiful story or design. I think you will enjoy what you find, as there is a lot more here than just beautiful images from the mind of Marko Djurdjevic.

Sincerely,

Jason Manley

President
www.massiveblack.com

Founding Director
www.conceptart.org

THE COVERS

"I look for opportunities to push the story on a two-dimensional, almost pictographic, level, and describe what's going to happen by using symbols. I think it's a valid form of expressing myself – to take some visual elements out of the literal. In this instance, I put a map of North America in the background and highlighted Florida, as that was the story where the X-Men were going to vacation and have a run-in with the Lizard. Coming up with design concepts like that is really interesting for me and really adds to the fun."

JAN 07 X-MEN FIRST CLASS ISSUE 03

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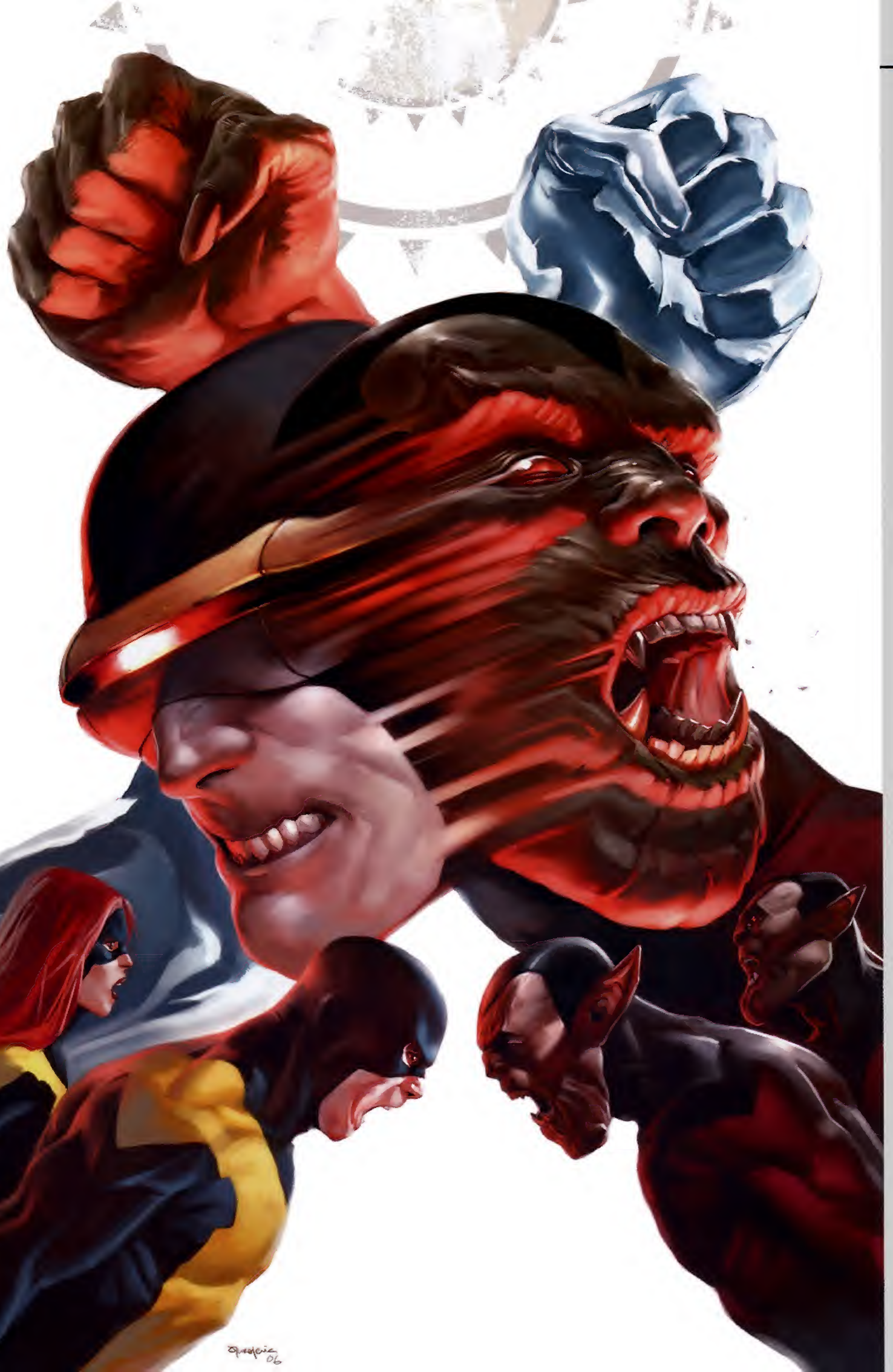
"My entire approach throughout this series was to use the old school nature of it as a base and then push the modernism as far as possible, to make those characters work as individuals even though they're all wearing the same uniform and there's only rudimentary differences between them."

"Joe Quesada had either seen his work online – or somebody had sent a link to Joe – where Marko had redesigned some of the He-Man characters. That is what caught Joe's eye. And then on further investigation we saw that he did some redesigns on X-Men characters. Joe said, 'Find this guy.' I just kept digging and digging until I found him through Massive Black. I reached out to him and said, 'Hey, Joe Quesada saw your art and wanted to know if you would be interested in doing some art for Marvel.' Marko was very excited about that because I think he was getting frustrated at doing design work for video games and never having his work be seen by the public." – **Chris Allo**

"I believe abstraction and modernism is one of the most simple but effective art forms; there are so many ties into graphic design. Whichever cover you take, you can zoom into a certain spot and it becomes more abstract the more you zoom into it. What I'm trying to do is just take this abstraction that happens in the microcosm and exploit it on the macrocosm. In using it for my backgrounds, I am able to create atmosphere, depth, shape, and meaning. The abstract graphic design shapes help to make the cover more alive, more fresh, and more centered around what is possible."

"After I reached out to Marko, I got more samples of his stuff. I showed it around, and all the reactions were very positive and encouraging. But when it gets down to it, most editors are hesitant to try new people. It took a little while to get him a gig, but I kept pushing, and pushing, and pushing, and finally Mark Paniccia hit on him and gave him the X-Men First Class covers."
– **Chris Allo**



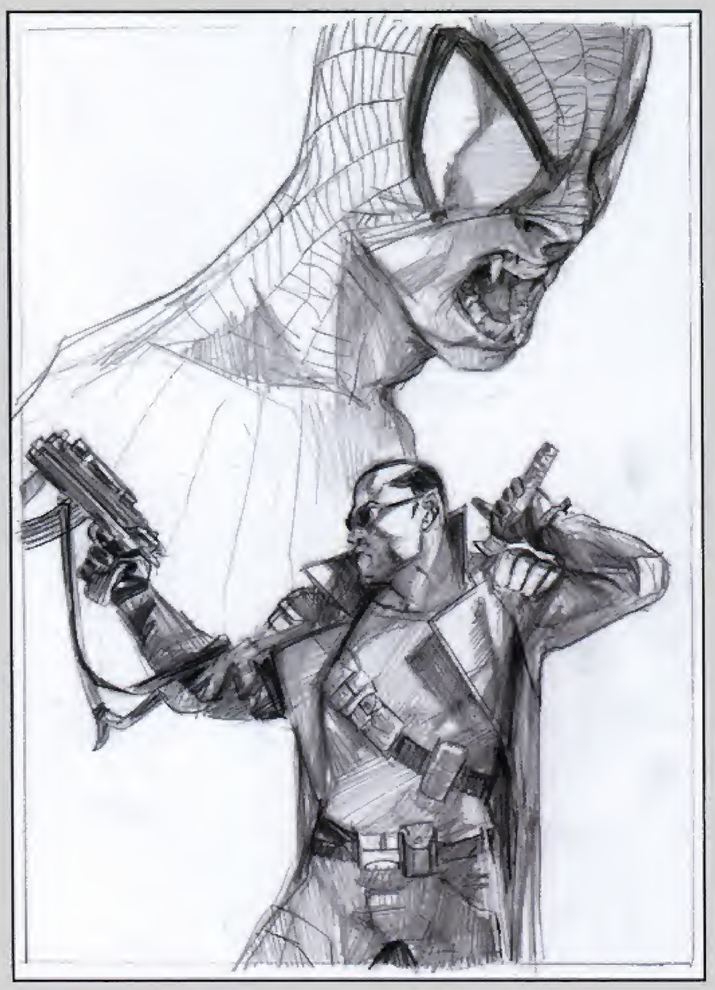
"Officially his first work for Marvel was an X-23 piece that was used as a variant cover on one of the mini-series. And then his first official body of work would be some of the X-Men First Class covers. From there, people saw what he can do and how fast he can do it. It was great because he turned in so many different sketch ideas for each cover, and that's something that editors really liked – being able to see the various different designs they could use for their covers. He took one idea and turned in multiple, different versions of it, and that was really appealing. He just became more and more attractive to editors, and then it just kind of snowballed from there." – **Chris Allo**

MAY 07 X-MEN FIRST CLASS ISSUE 07

"I thought it was so cheesy when I got to the editorial description of Scarlet Witch and Angel being involved. They wanted this romantic cover from me, so I decided to go over-the-top and make it as cheesy and corny as I possibly could – make it look like a romance novel, perhaps about a summer love, the kind of book that you might read on the veranda when you have nothing else to do. It turned out to be liked by so many people precisely because of the romance angle, which wasn't even my intention. I really didn't even think about it having that impact."

"As an illustrator, it's important to be able to draw anything. And when I don't know something I have to at least take a look at it, figure out how it works, and then go back to the drawing board and take what I just learned and recreate it in a certain form. For instance, the need to draw Gorilla Man, the character from *Agents of Atlas*. I wanted to get away from the cartoonish version that he was drawn in and just give him a little bit more realistic flair."

"At the time I did this I had no knowledge of the character; they just wanted a test piece. The description from Chris Allo went something like 'She's a 16-year-old, teenage prostitute living on the streets of New York.' I was channeling what girls I liked when I was a teenager looked like – how I might have liked them to dress – and I went for that. That was just pure intuition because I really had no idea what she was supposed to look like."

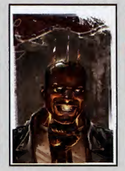


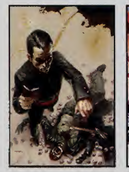
"If you look at the movie *Goodfellas,* it really shows the dark side of who we are as human beings. At the same time, however, it's a brutally humorous film. No matter how cruel and how vicious some of the scenes are, at times you can't help but laugh. And I guess I pretty much took the same approach with my Blade covers. No matter how cruel and violent they come across, they still have this sense of humor, exaggeration, and over-the-top quality that makes them stand out."

"If you look at my work in general, you can see that I shy away from exaggerated stylization of anatomy in my work. My job is to make the story behind the cover stand out, and sometimes I do that with humor, and sometimes with exaggeration. But most of the time I'm just trying to filter what the story is and make that stand out."

"I've got to admit, when I did this cover my wife was in the last months of her pregnancy, I was super-nervous, and also very overworked. It was supposed to go to (inker) Danny Miki, get inked, and then go off to get colored. As soon as I got my part done I heard from Marvel that Danny couldn't ink it, so they asked me if I could paint it. I basically had a few hours to get it out of the door. It's one of those covers where I feel I could have done better."

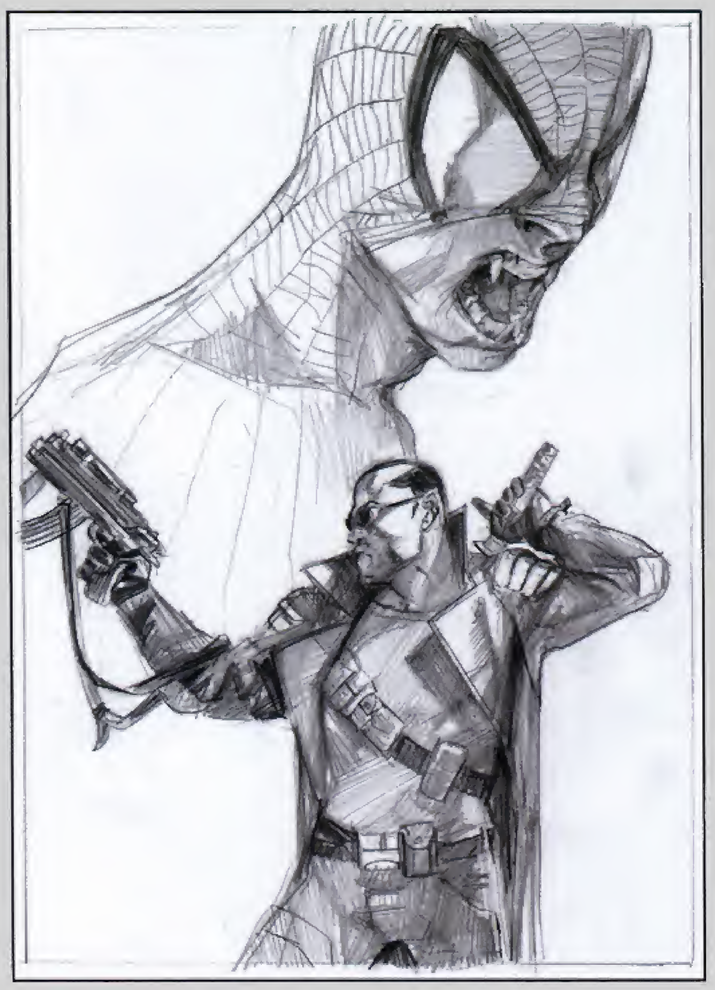
CHAPTER 02
BLADE





This compact, twelve-issue series was writer Marc Guggenheim's ode to vampires – and the enigmatic Blade who lived to kill them. Staying alive for over a hundred years as an immortal hunter of the undead will get you to indulge in some inventive new ways to take out your ubiquitous targets. All part of enjoying your job, one would suppose. The subtle humor inherent in Guggenheim's stories was telegraphed by the playful sense of stylized comedy in Marko's covers. Comedy tinged with violence, naturally – and some would say ultra-violence. And that's fine with Marko. All part of enjoying his job!

MARKO "This was the only series where all the editors just left me alone and let me go crazy with my designs. I figured, why not take in some humor and just try to make it really funny? Blade has been done so many times already, so I felt like if all the volumes before didn't hit the nail on the head then maybe my route might really work out. People might appreciate the humor behind it."



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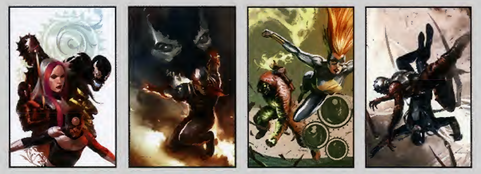
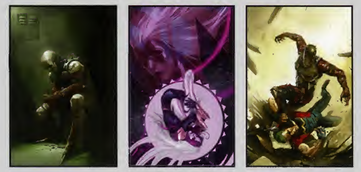
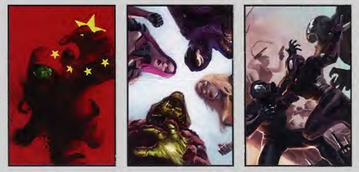
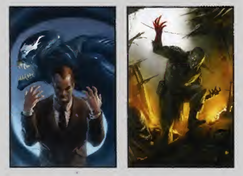
CHAPTER 03
THUNDERBOLTS









In the aftermath of Marvel's Civil War *event, Warren Ellis revamped the Thunderbolts – an ad hoc team of erstwhile bad guys seeking redemption and their country's good favor – into a government-endorsed rabble of inveterate villains encouraged to play the system as registration enforcers. But no matter how good players like Bullseye, Venom, Swordsman and Moonstone think they are – and they are good – they could never hope to outwit the cunning team leader Norman Osborn. (That didn't mean they wouldn't try.) Leading the team into an unending trip of missions steeped in hallucinatory violence and mayhem, Osborn knew the weak points of each character and exploited them like the master manipulator he is.*

In truth, the Thunderbolts only equal during Osborn's tenure may well have been the cover artist. During a stellar 16-month run, Marko Djurdjevic balanced T'bolts covers with insightful character studies and a riot of colors – producing works that were either calmly contemplative or gleeful in their abandon. It was a series where Marko really made his mark. Coulda made it as a Thunderbolt? No…he's too good for that!

MARKO "Much like *Blade*, this was a very dark book that really suited my tastes. The book's editor, Molly Lazer, sent me the first scripts, and I was amazed how well they were written. Then I found out it was written by Warren Ellis, and I wasn't that amazed anymore – that's the kind of quality you expect from a good writer. It had such a nasty, gritty tone and the kind of twisted humor that I like. It really inspired me. As long as I worked on *Thunderbolts*, I was having a total blast, approaching my work with enthusiasm and a real sense of pleasure."

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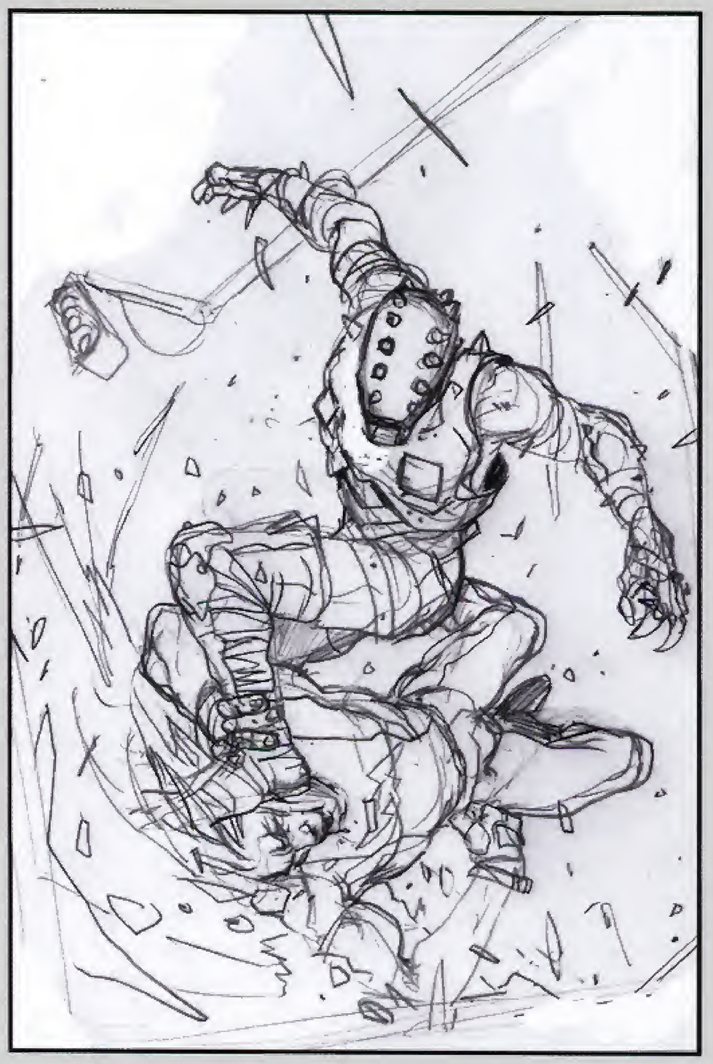

"A couple of things were really interesting for me with this design. I wanted to make the character part of the flag. At the same time, I wanted to make him reach out of the flag, towards the viewer, to show that he's part of China, but at the same time he's coming for you.

"I tinted everything red except for his mask and the stars. The stars I couldn't tint because otherwise the identity of the flag wouldn't have been understood, and the mask I didn't want to tint because green is a complementary color of red. It's the strongest contrast between two colors that you can get, and the fact that such a small part of the image is green, and the rest is red just makes the green pop even more.

"The editors asked me to show Radioactive Man as the Chinese representative of super heroes in America, to show him carrying himself as an elite member of the world's heroes. That is why I wanted this cover to be iconic and have a lot of punch.

"I kept the entire right side very cleanly rendered, while the entire left side is broken up with sprinkles and splatters, giving the impression that it's all falling apart. This is a device I use a lot when I want to achieve a certain form of drama: using contrasting ways of approaching an image, like going from a neatly rendered description to something which is very sketchy and very loose. In this way, I can show the entire spectrum."

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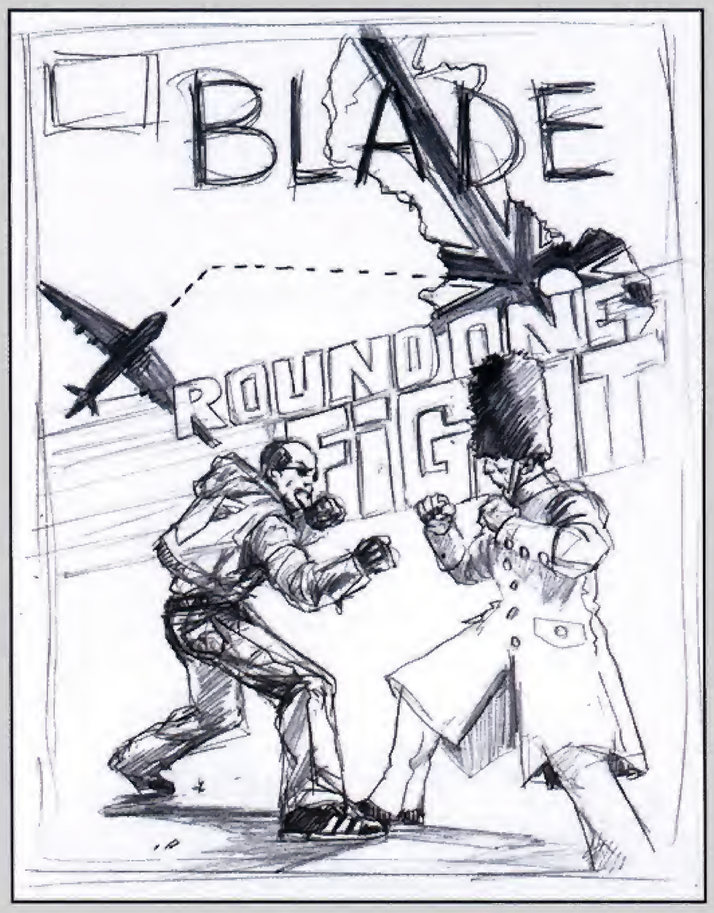
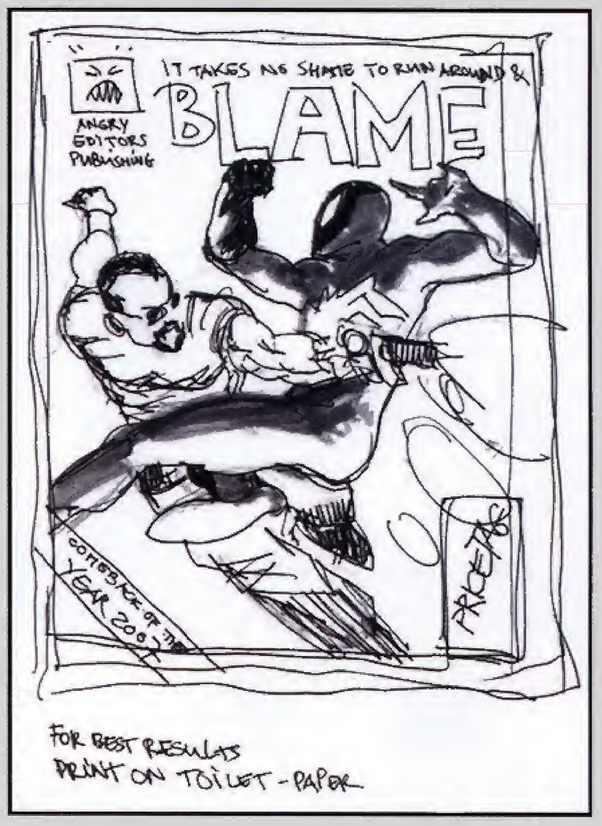


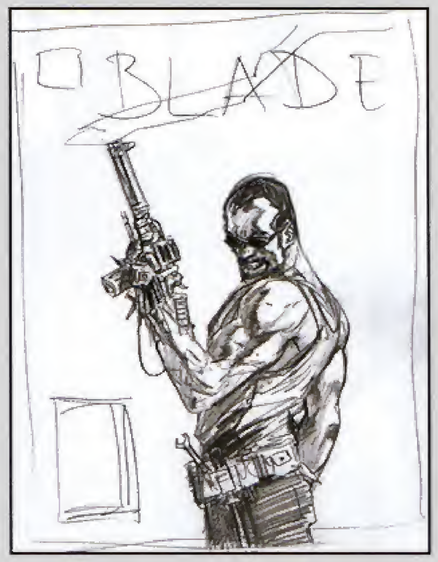
'This is also one of my favorites because the design includes the entire story. I managed to put the entire premise of the story on there and also managed to make fun of myself. In that issue, Blade is traveling to London in search of his father, and he gets into a fight with vampires at Buckingham Palace. There are many design touches: on Blade's jacket, there's the heart with the stake that goes through it (instead of an arrow)…the type above it which says "Round One: Fight" to push the *Mortal Kombat*-type pop culture… the pictogram of the airplane flying to London which implies the team-up with Union Jack...the simplified version of Great Britain in the background. All of that really played together so well and I was so happy with the image.

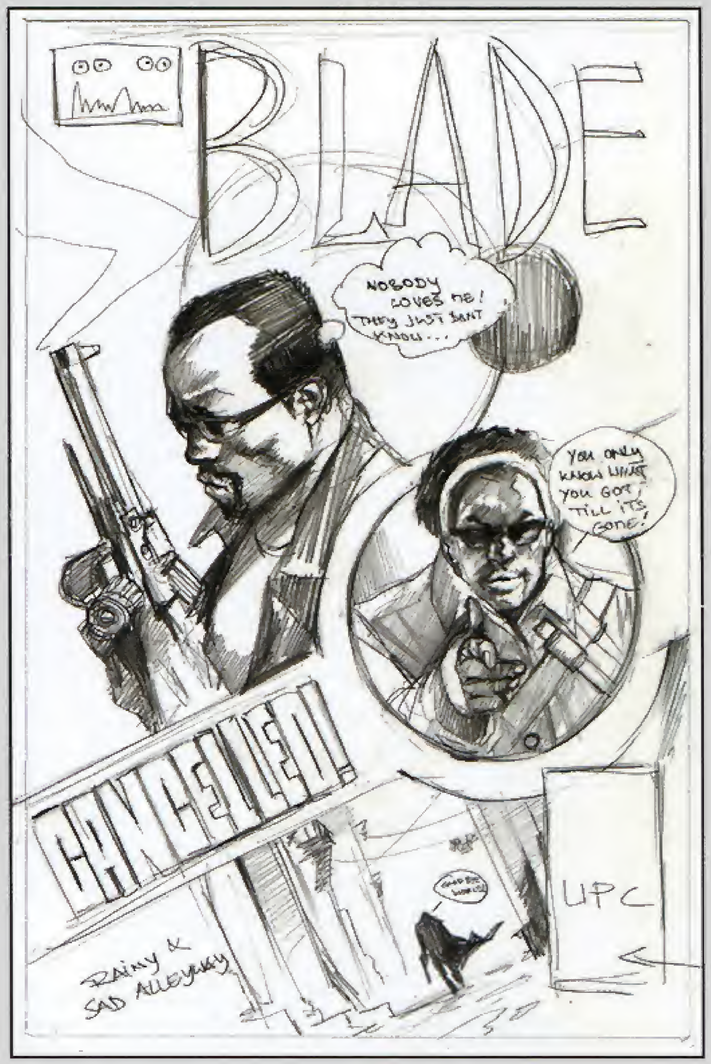
"As for the 'Hack' blurb, at that time I was browsing a couple of online message boards and people were calling me out as a hack because I was using graphic design and I wasn't painting my backgrounds fully. And I thought, 'Okay, that's the perfect thing to put on the cover. If people are that stupid that they claim I'm dodging the painting of backgrounds by using graphic design as a storytelling method, I'm just gonna slap that blurb on there and leave it as it is.'"



"Sometimes I find the funniest posts online about my work. It's just amazing. For example, people write, 'I really like his drawings but his colorist sucks!' What the #*$@? I don't even have a colorist! It's all me. Get informed. Read something up about me before you make a comment like that. People make up the worst stuff just to tear somebody down. But I can't take it seriously. I just smirk every time I read something like that."

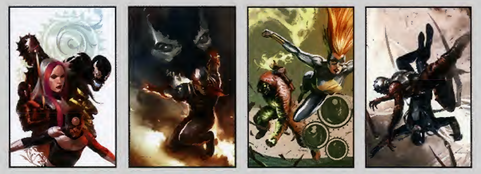
"*Blade #11* was the next to last issue. Blade would be going off against his dad, the entire series was building up to that point, and I said, 'Okay, let's just do it. Let's just take the boxing route.' To say, 'This is the final match in the entire bout.' That's what sold the book. If I would have just shown Blade literally beating up his dad, or his dad beating up Blade, it would have just been another fight cover. And I think that it's my job as an illustrator to come up with different ideas for the same theme."

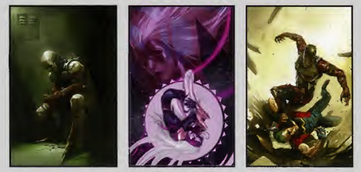


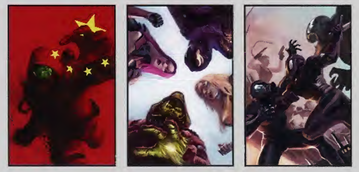


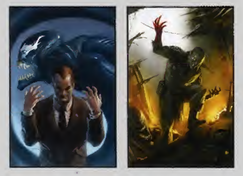
"*Blade* was one of my first regular gigs that I had. It was great because every week I would paint an *X-Men First Class* cover – which was for all ages – where I had to knock out a cover that was nice and appealing to children. But at the end of the week, I could start on *Blade* and just get all my frustrations out again! I guess that's probably the biggest contrast in my work: If you look at those two gigs – which were done at the same time – you can realize how big the spectrum actually is."

CHAPTER 03
THUNDERBOLTS





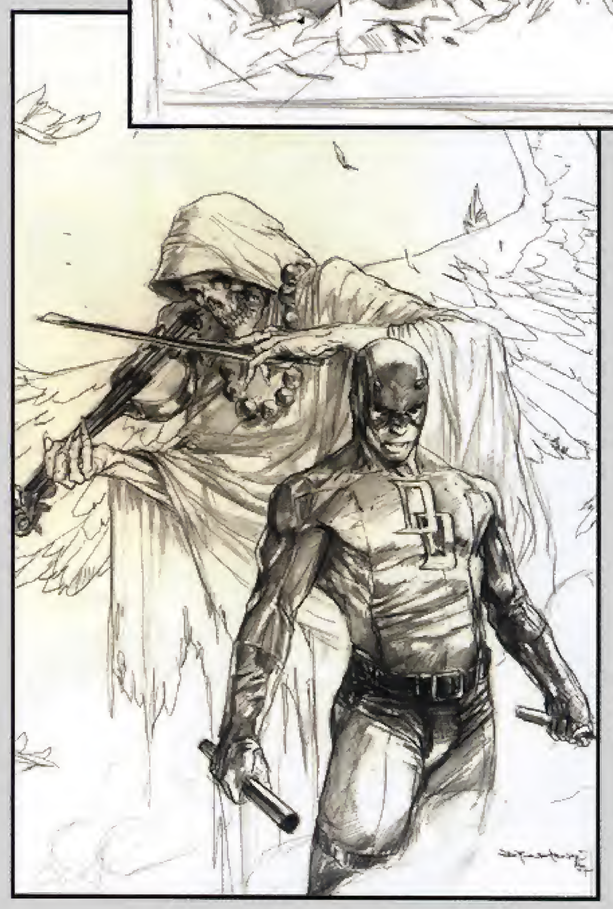




In the aftermath of Marvel's Civil War *event, Warren Ellis revamped the Thunderbolts – an ad hoc team of erstwhile bad guys seeking redemption and their country's good favor – into a government-endorsed rabble of inveterate villains encouraged to play the system as registration enforcers. But no matter how good players like Bullseye, Venom, Swordsman and Moonstone think they are – and they are good – they could never hope to outwit the cunning team leader Norman Osborn. (That didn't mean they wouldn't try.) Leading the team into an unending trip of missions steeped in hallucinatory violence and mayhem, Osborn knew the weak points of each character and exploited them like the master manipulator he is.*

In truth, the Thunderbolts only equal during Osborn's tenure may well have been the cover artist. During a stellar 16-month run, Marko Djurdjevic balanced T'bolts covers with insightful character studies and a riot of colors – producing works that were either calmly contemplative or gleeful in their abandon. It was a series where Marko really made his mark. Coulda made it as a Thunderbolt? No…he's too good for that!

MARKO "Much like *Blade*, this was a very dark book that really suited my tastes. The book's editor, Molly Lazer, sent me the first scripts, and I was amazed how well they were written. Then I found out it was written by Warren Ellis, and I wasn't that amazed anymore – that's the kind of quality you expect from a good writer. It had such a nasty, gritty tone and the kind of twisted humor that I like. It really inspired me. As long as I worked on *Thunderbolts*, I was having a total blast, approaching my work with enthusiasm and a real sense of pleasure."



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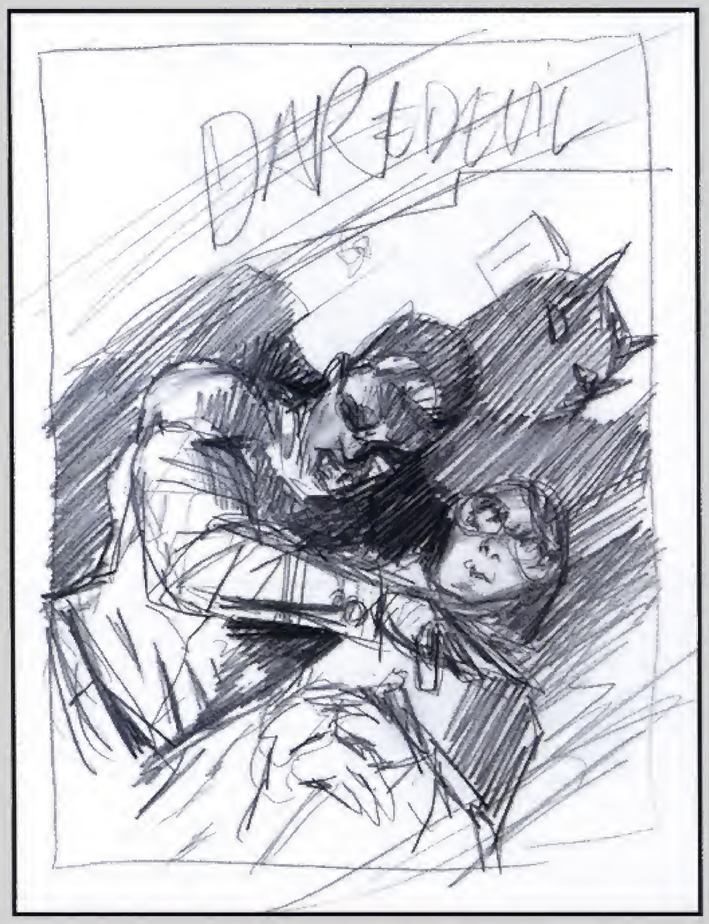
DAREDEVIL

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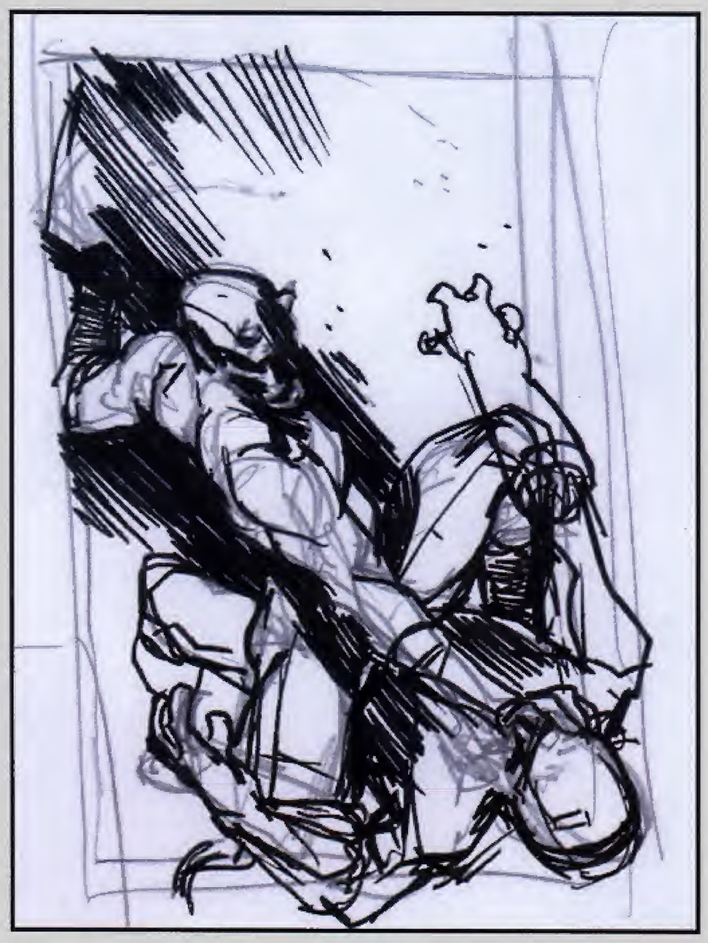
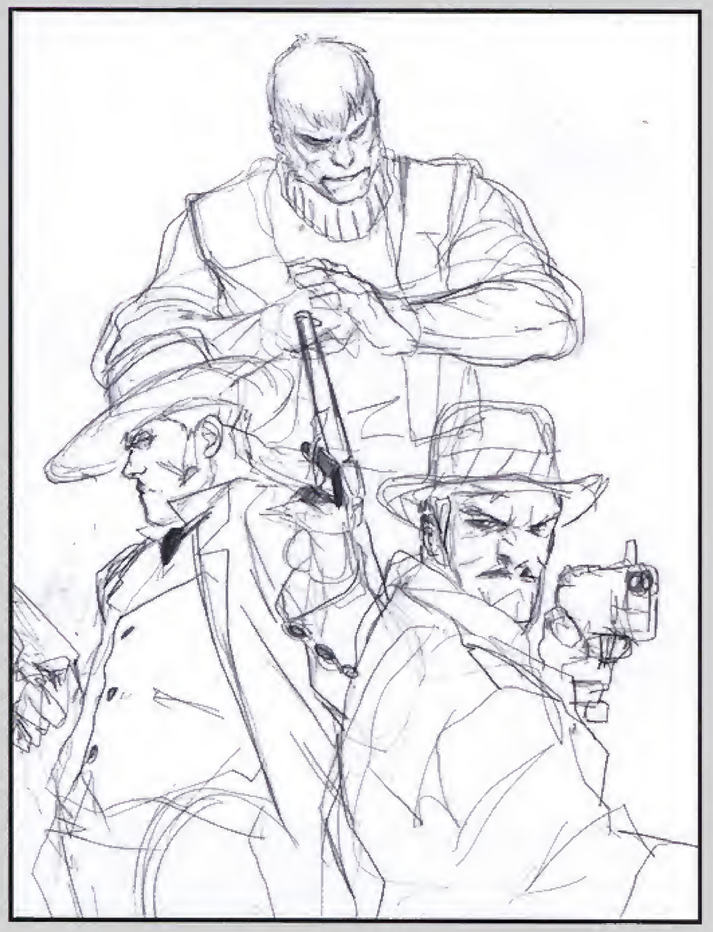
DEC 07 DAREDEVIL ANNUAL #1





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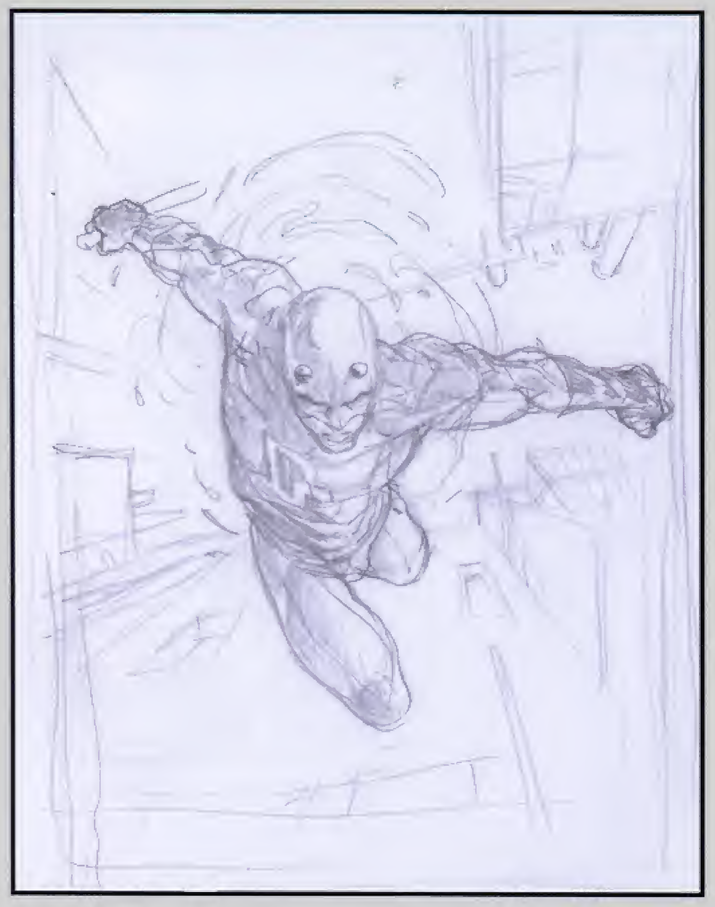

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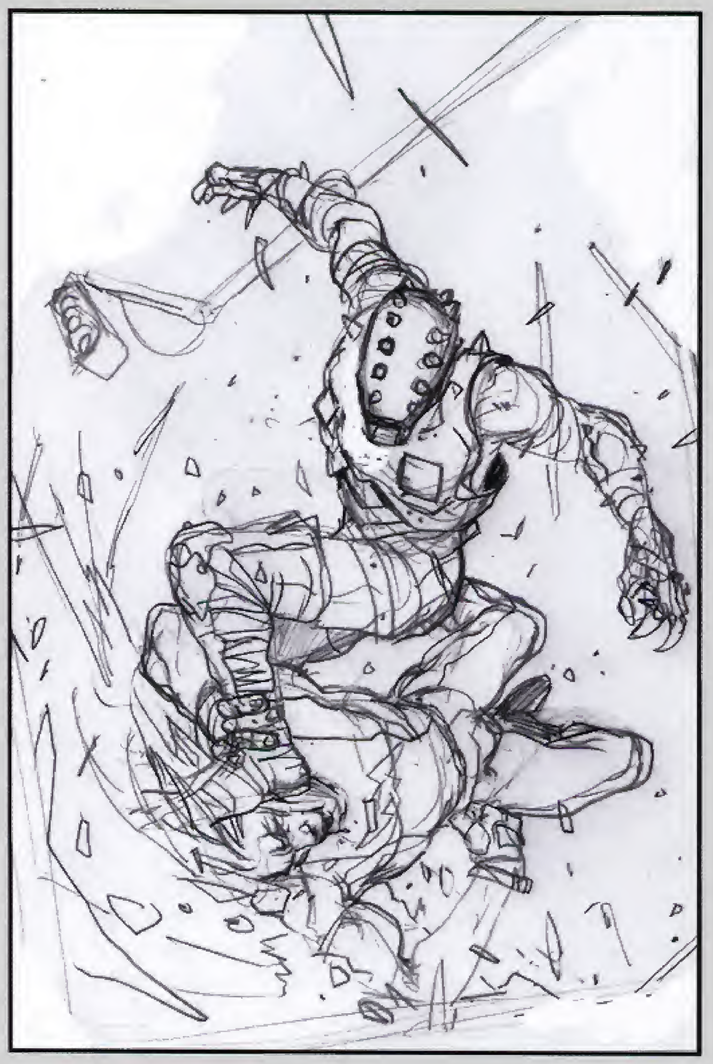
MAR 08 THUNDERBOLTS ISSUE 118



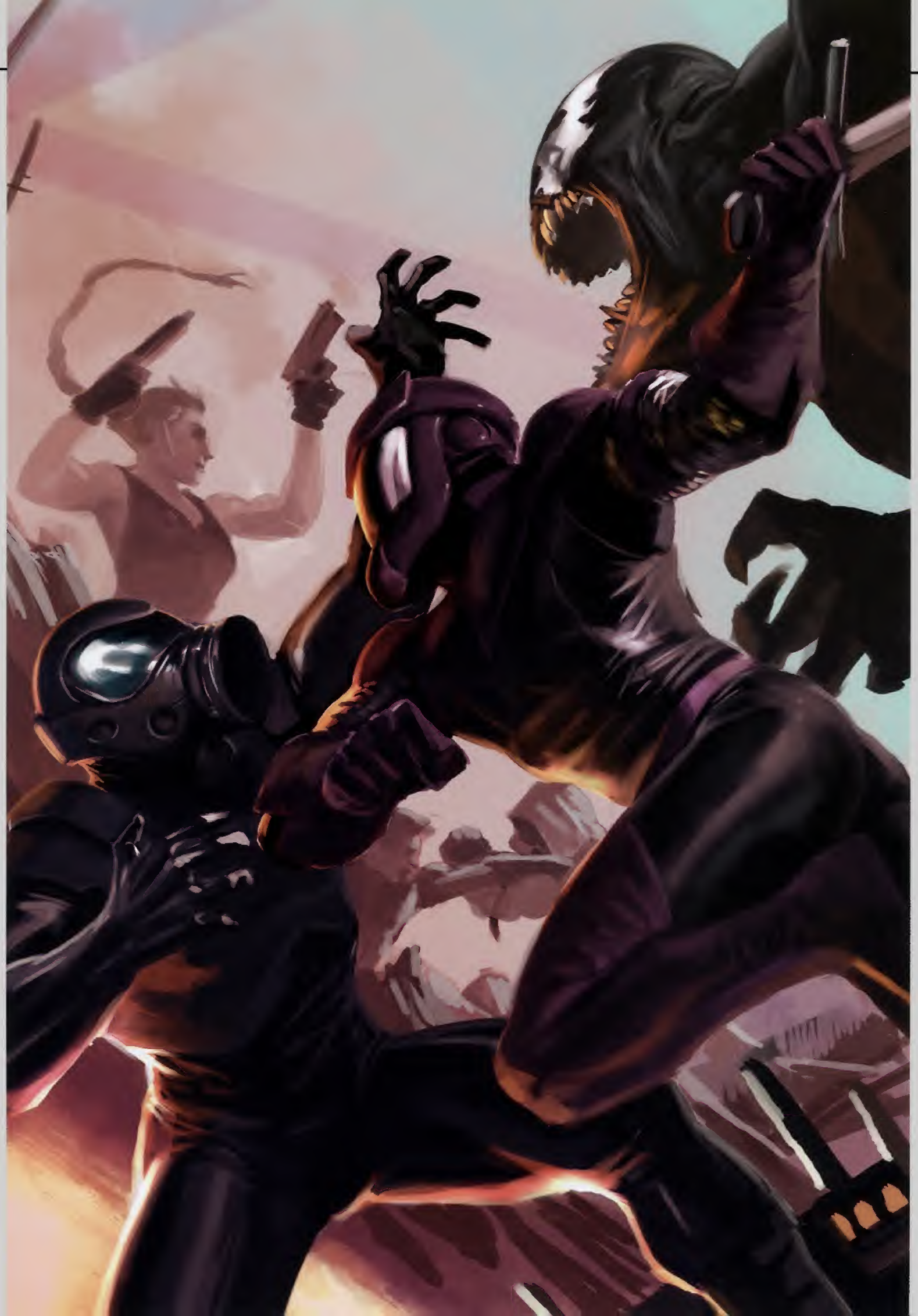
"A couple of things were really interesting for me with this design. I wanted to make the character part of the flag. At the same time, I wanted to make him reach out of the flag, towards the viewer, to show that he's part of China, but at the same time he's coming for you.

"I tinted everything red except for his mask and the stars. The stars I couldn't tint because otherwise the identity of the flag wouldn't have been understood, and the mask I didn't want to tint because green is a complementary color of red. It's the strongest contrast between two colors that you can get, and the fact that such a small part of the image is green, and the rest is red just makes the green pop even more.

"The editors asked me to show Radioactive Man as the Chinese representative of super heroes in America, to show him carrying himself as an elite member of the world's heroes. That is why I wanted this cover to be iconic and have a lot of punch.

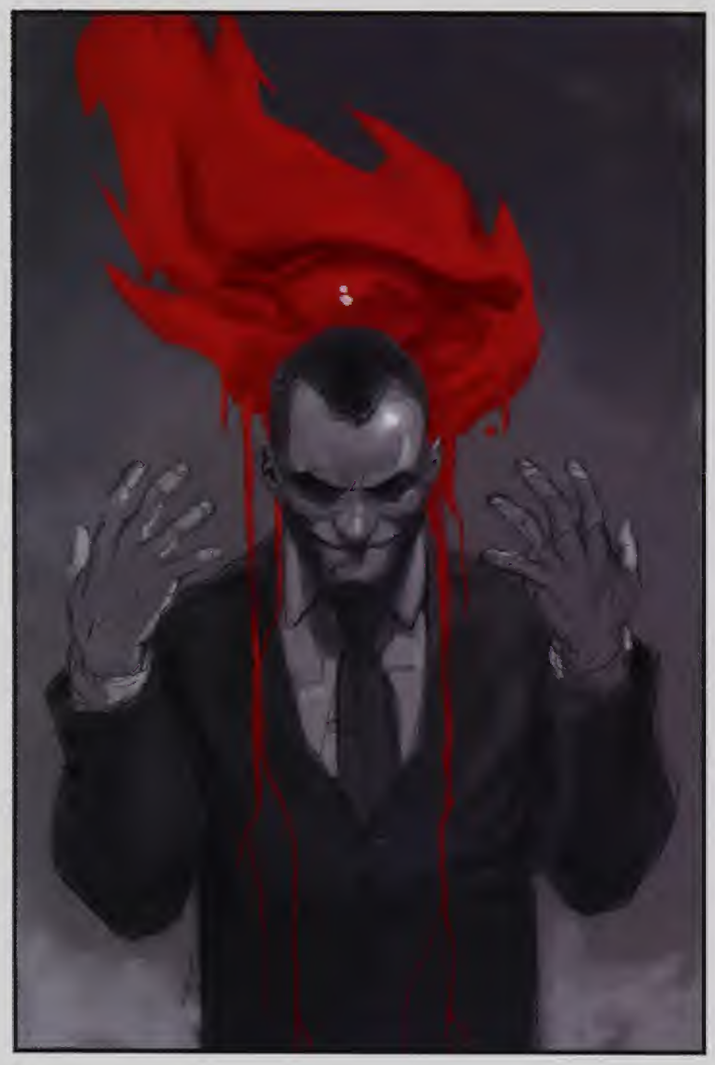
"I kept the entire right side very cleanly rendered, while the entire left side is broken up with sprinkles and splatters, giving the impression that it's all falling apart. This is a device I use a lot when I want to achieve a certain form of drama: using contrasting ways of approaching an image, like going from a neatly rendered description to something which is very sketchy and very loose. In this way, I can show the entire spectrum."

MAY 08 THUNDERBOLTS ISSUE 119

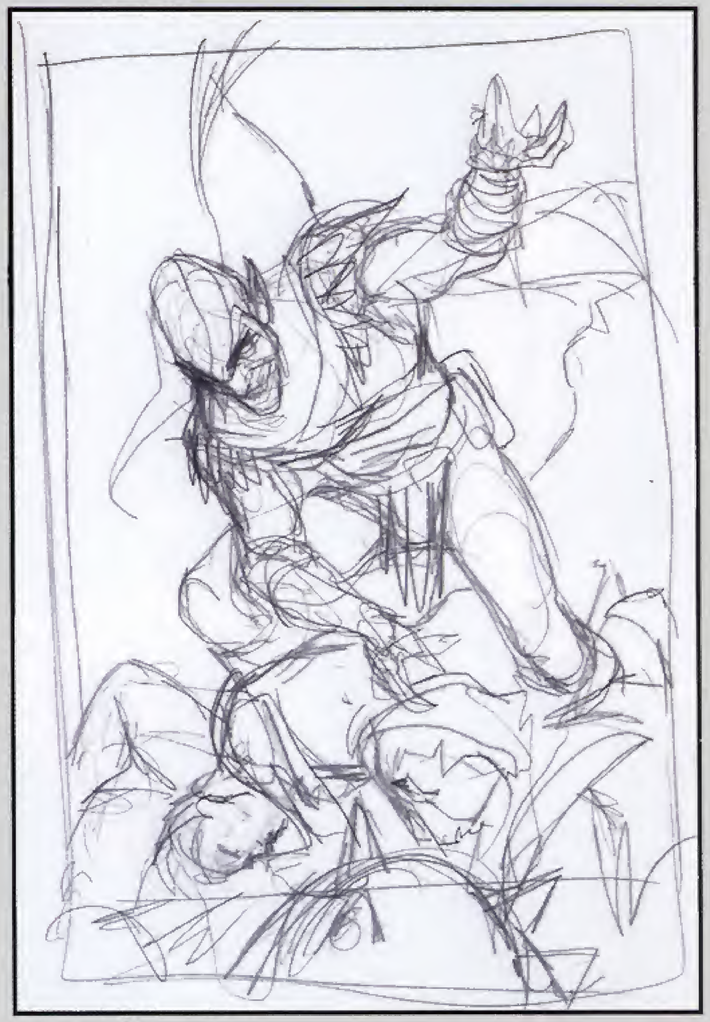


JUL 08

THUNDERBOLTS
REASON IN MADNESS



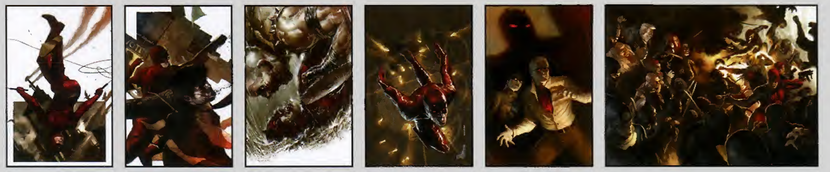
"If you locate the colors you want to push, and you know what you're doing colorwise, it can have such a nice effect. You truly have the chance to tell the entire story of an image with the way you use color. It's a very conscious decision for me every time I do it. I just try to come up with the right combination of colors that will sell the content for me."

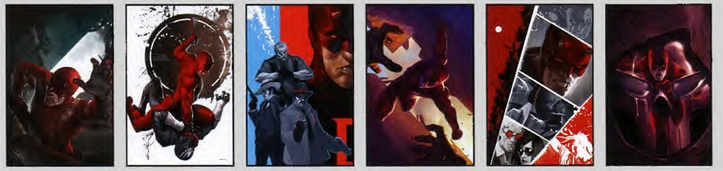


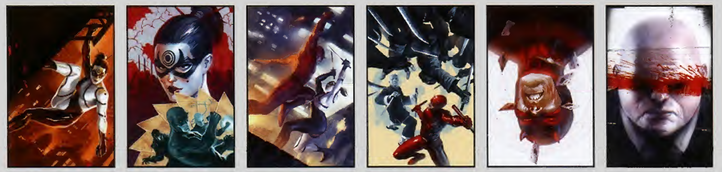
"Warren Ellis was leaving with this issue, his whole storyline coming to a conclusion. I only knew that Norman Osborn was going to go nuts, and there was going to be a lot of action, a lot of craziness in that final issue. With Norman turning against his Thunderbolts and heads rolling, I decided I wanted to describe the moment of the aftermath, the moment of 'crazy Osborn' being triumphant and standing on top of the heap.

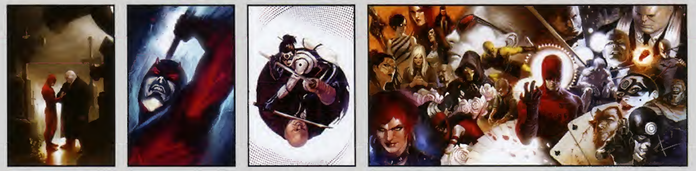
"Again, I go for a contrast: It is a picture that is tinted in greens and is very muted in the way it's colored. But then you have his red hand, which is the strongest contrast in terms of color scheme, and it affirms the visual qualities of the story in the same way as the *International Incident* cover."

CHAPTER 04
DAREDEVIL



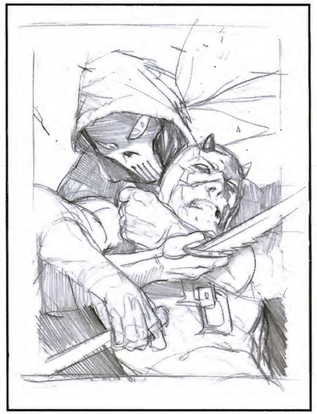






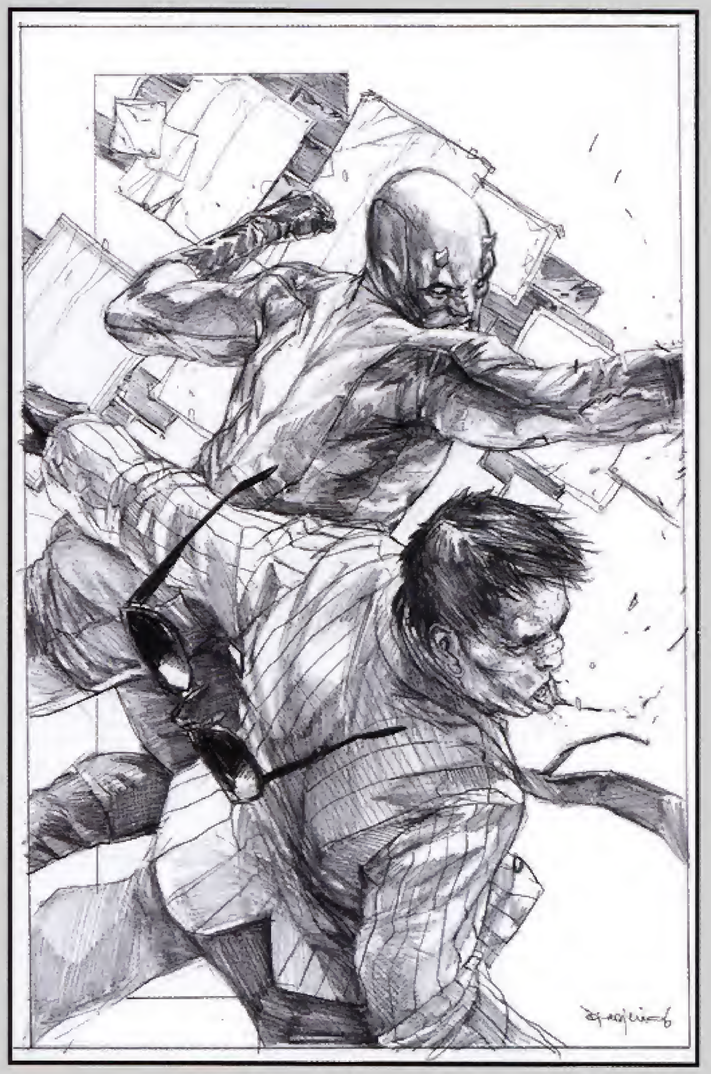
If Thunderbolts *was Marko's breakout book,* Daredevil *is the title where fans first began certifying his star quality. Holding down the front covers of the Ed Brubaker and Michael Lark series, he formed the third part in a trinity of talents that helped further the evolution of the franchise that had, for the last ten years, been at the forefront of Marvel's latter day creative resurgence.* Daredevil *was also the first time Marko would work on a monthly basis with editor Warren Simons, establishing a relationship that to this day flourishes with a bond of mutual respect. As editor, Simons is charged with finding cover artists that can intuit the feel of the interior story and then translate that into both a creative and saleable piece of art. He quickly realized that in Marko, he had a winner – on all counts. 'He's trustworthy, he's fast, he's reliable, he's got a great understanding of art,' plus, Warren adds, 'he's a really sweet guy. That's a nice asset for any artist.' That's the kind of editorial assessment that'll get you regular work!*

With Daredevil, *Marko explored the murky darkness right along with the blind super hero, a world where Matt Murdock's super-powered sonar may deftly compensate for his lost sight, but it's always navigating his passage through the darker regions of his soul that requires a set of completely different senses. This run of covers features easily some of Marko's best work, and it's a run that he completes in 2009 with not only a great sense of personal satisfaction, but the unqualified esteem of his peers, especially his boss. Says Simon, "I've told him not to let it go to his head, but he doesn't know how good he is."*



MARKO "I have a more personal connection with Daredevil than virtually any other Marvel character. He's a street level character, he's not super strong, he's blind, he has only one super-power and that's to navigate the world in his own blindness. Everything about him is very realistic. The comic worlds he inhabits are full of a gritty, film noirish atmosphere, where he's constantly attending to real world issues – far more than any other character out there. I've seen more stories of drugs and violence and depravity in *Daredevil* than in any other book. The feelings of loss and tragedy follow him no matter what he does."

"I think there's a beautiful energy through Marko's work. He's an excellent draftsman, with a superior understanding of anatomy from a strictly rendering standpoint. There's such a fine representational quality to his stuff. He's also the kind of the artist that you wouldn't be surprised if he has an encyclopedic knowledge of art history, because the guy came to us almost as a fully formed artist with a comprehseinve understanding of perspective, anatomy, and composition. That's quite a combination." – **Warren Simons**



"As his editor, I also get a sense that he cares about the work he's doing. He cares to make sure that every single piece is going to be terrific. He's not a guy who ever cuts a corner, even if he's underwater. And that's just a very different mindset than a lot of guys have, as if he's aware that every piece of work he's doing might be framed and put up on a wall somewhere. He is creating art that will be around for a very long time; he's not rushing, he's really trying to put his heart into it. And that's also a huge thing for an editor like me, to work with a freelancer who cares about what he's doing."
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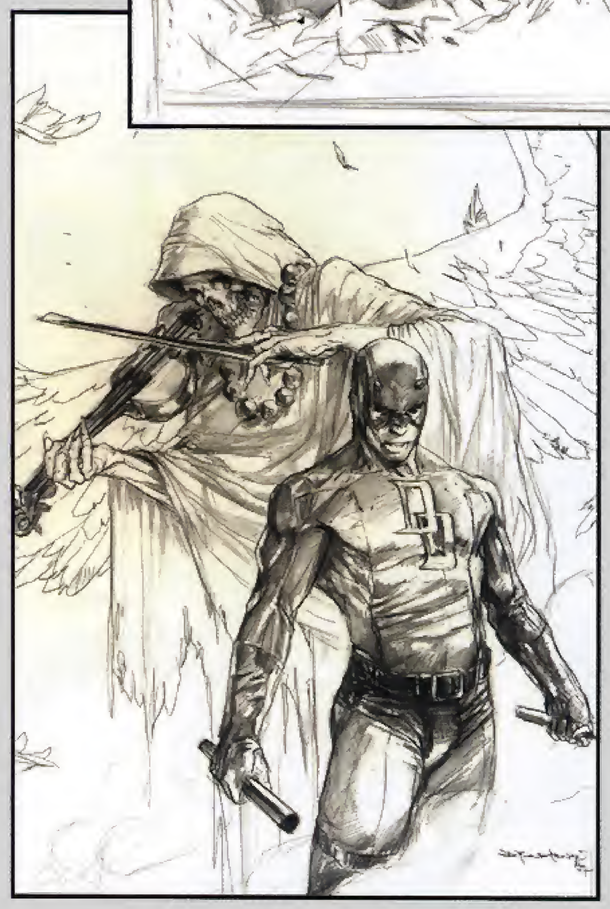

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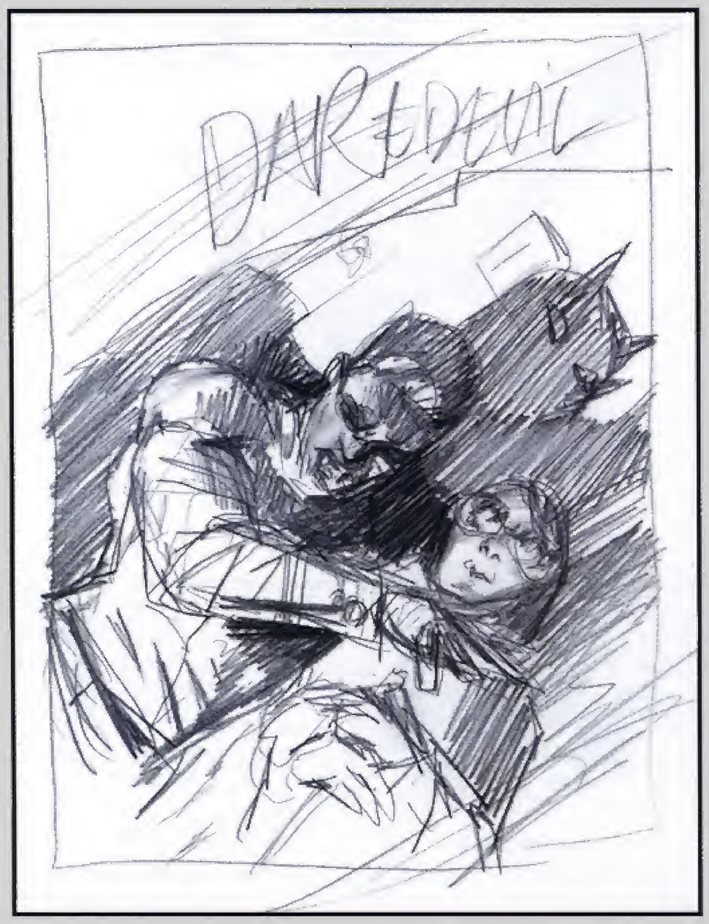
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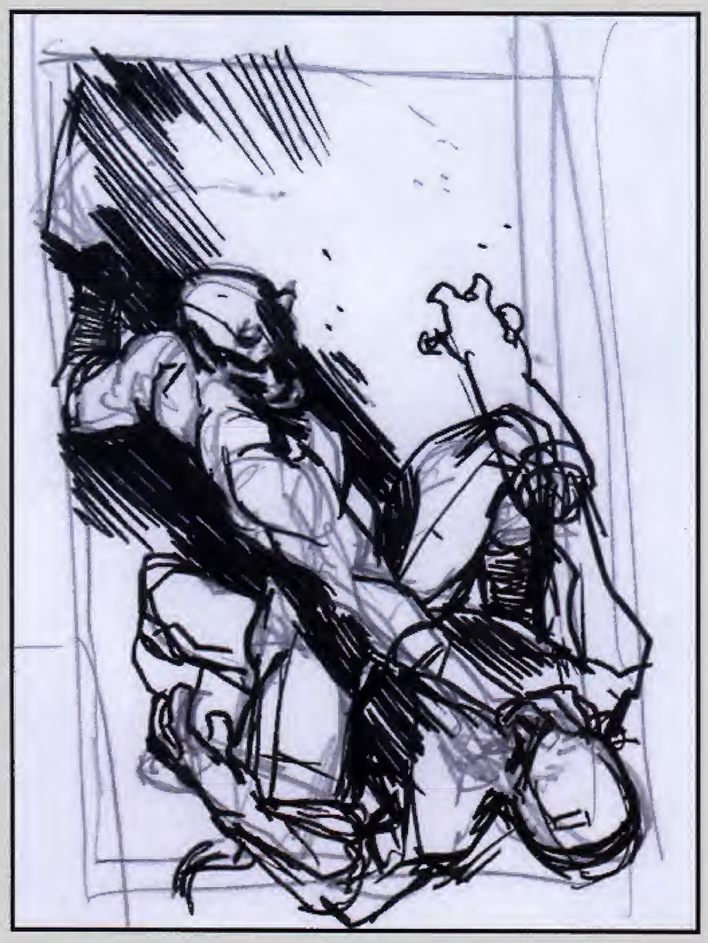
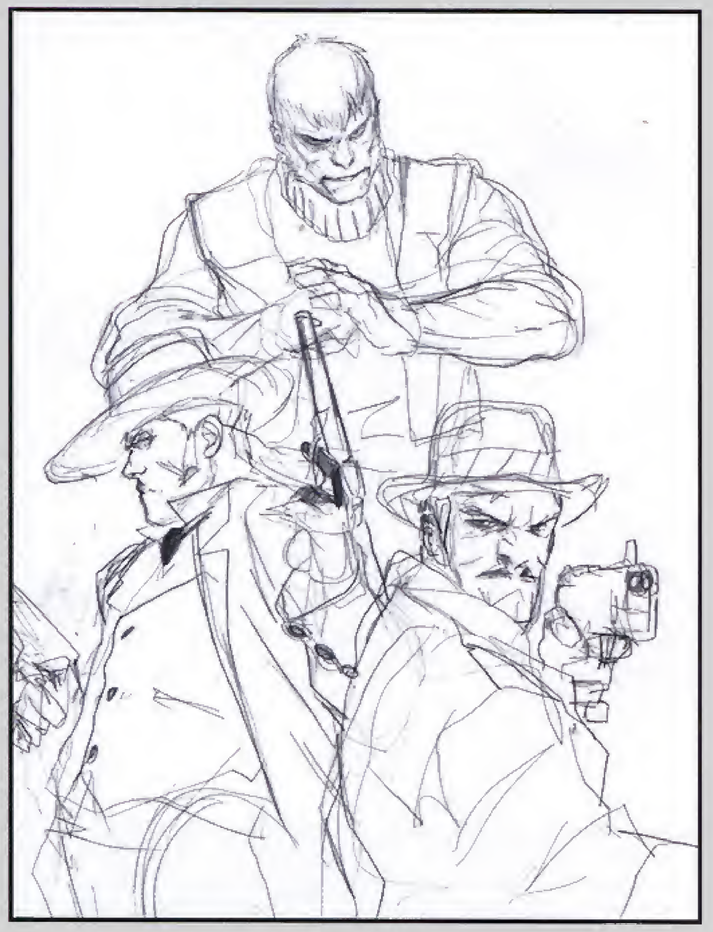
DEC 07 DAREDEVIL ANNUAL #1





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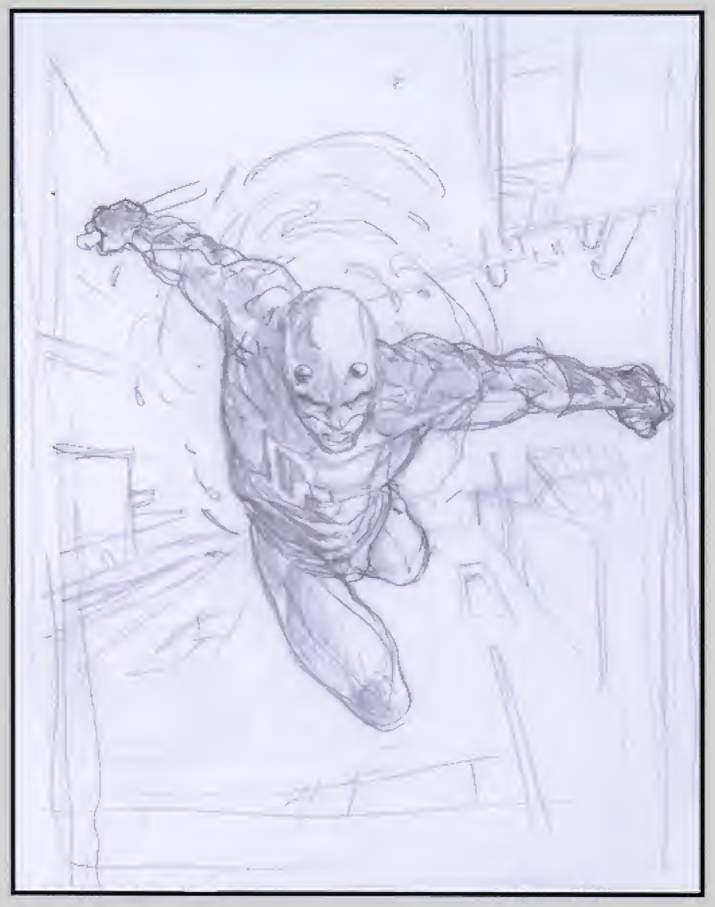

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"This is based on Ed Brubaker's idea. He gave me a list of things he wanted referenced on the cover and to build them up in a montage like an old film noir movie poster. The montage eventually included the Statue of Liberty, the statue of Justice, New York City, Matt Murdock, the Enforcers, and Daredevil.

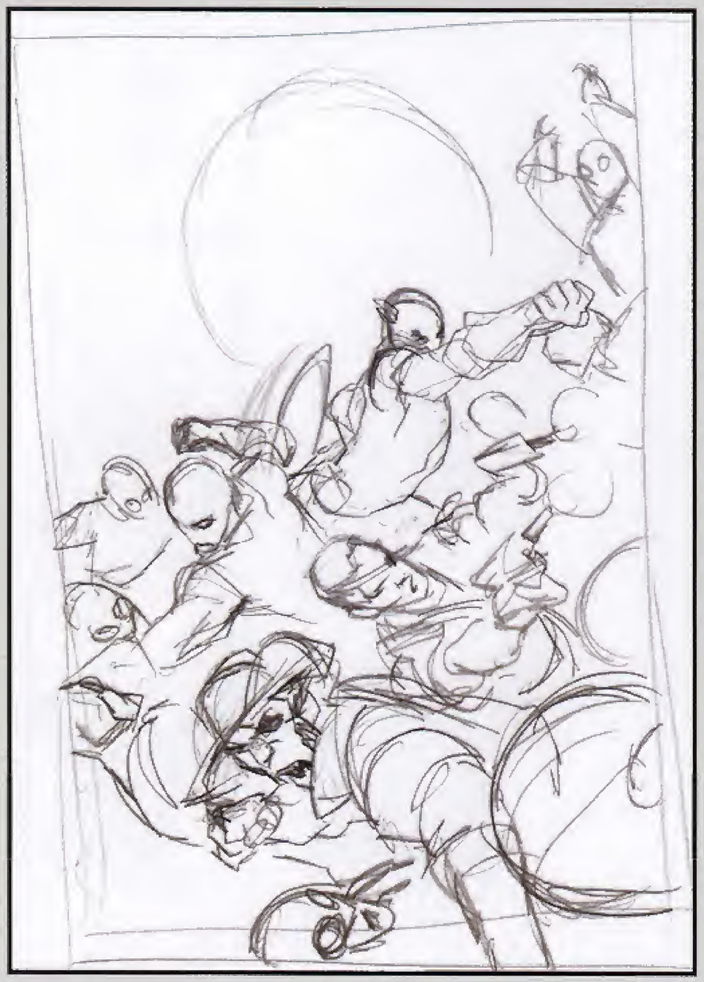
"Sometimes with *Daredevil* I would just ask for descriptions because – after working four months ahead of everybody to ready the covers that needed to be solicited – often the story wasn't even written yet. It's important for me to make sure I'm not painting something that has nothing to do with the story."

"This cover was to the finale of the Mr. Fear and Daredevil storyline, the culmination of everything that's occurred in the past twelve issues. When I found out that Mr. Fear comes out on top in the end, it made me laugh really hard because it's such a rarity when a villain actually gets the upper hand and keeps it throughout an entire storyline.

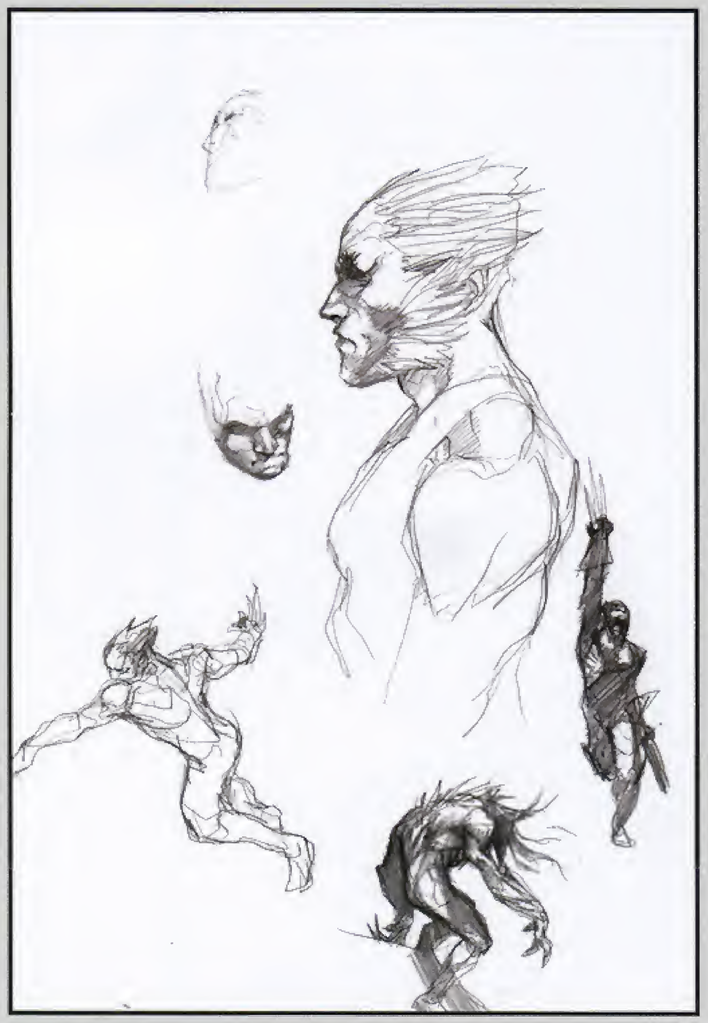
"That conceit really charged me up. When I sat down to paint this, I wanted to convey how smart and how much larger than life Mr. Fear is compared to Daredevil, so I began by enlarging his face mask over the entire cover, allowing just the smallest reflection of Daredevil off his mask. I wanted to imply Daredevil's looming defeat, how he is so much weaker – so much so that he's trapped in Fear's plot and there's no way out for him. And I really felt that the immediate danger of that translated well in that image.

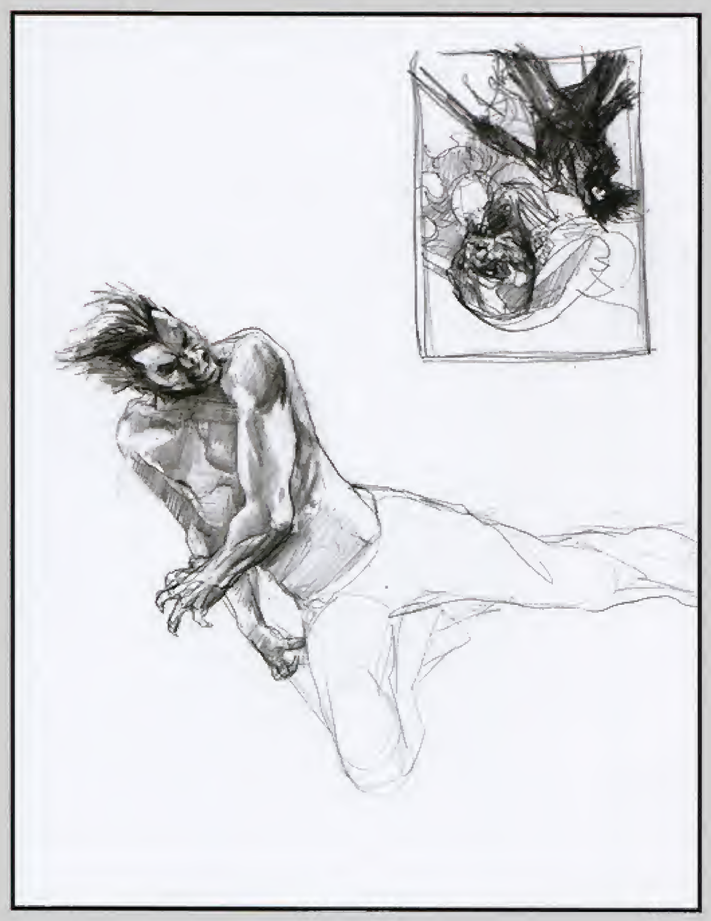
"My original sketch had a more orange tint to it, but I'm so intuitive with colors. I don't follow a strong set of rules by the time I get

DEC 07 WOLVERINE: ORIGINS ISSUE 18



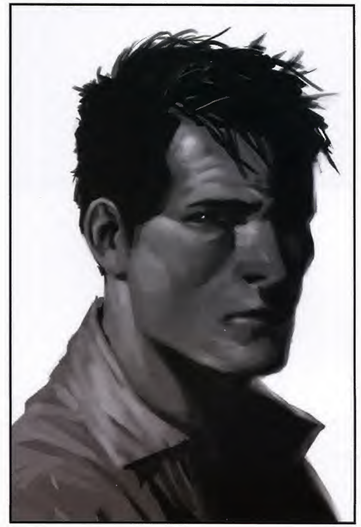
FEB 08 WOLVERINE: ORIGINS ISSUE 20





CHAPTER 07
SPIDER-MAN: ONE MORE DAY

The four-issue Spider-Man crossover event One More Day *brought an end to the marriage of Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson, a move that, needless to say, was very controversial. Though its storyline launched a well-received "Brand New Day" revamp – a new look at the character and its universe – many fans were rankled that attempts to keep Marvel's most iconic character fresh for a new era also meant upending the twenty-year (in the real world, not comic book time) marriage. Despite much hubbub about the storyline on the inside of the book, the OMD variant covers by Marko were universally hailed. The artist produced a series of spare character studies that were light on design effects and explosive, attention-getting colors, but as engrossing as anything he'd produced in his career. It was an appropriate and respectful way to see Peter and MJ fade into white…*



MARKO "As simple a concept as there is: The description for the covers was to show four characters, each on a white page, and reveal through their emotions a little bit more of the story. And by 'reveal,' I don't mean explicitly showing any plot points or events. I mean transporting the mood that is established in the book.

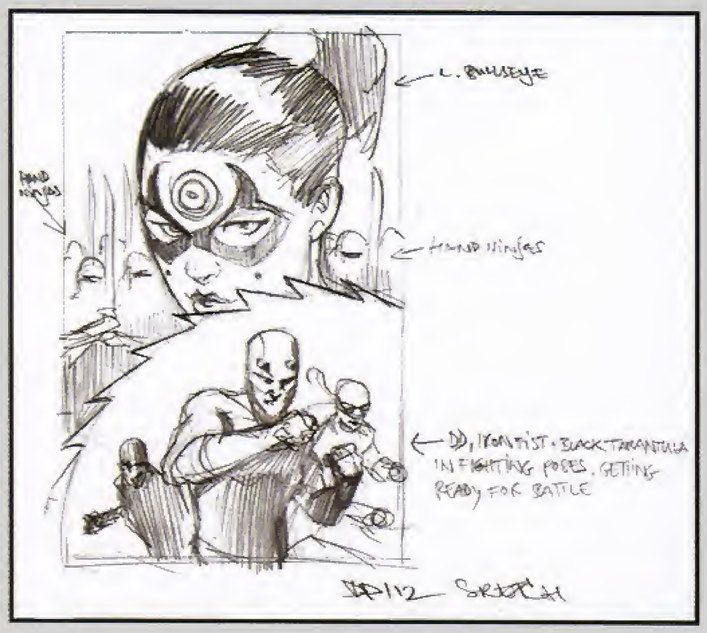
"That is an essential part of being a good illustrator, revealing dimensions of a person's soul through body language. It's what you can do with a character when he's not engaged in action; so many covers are full of action, which is nice, but you can only draw so many faces that are grinning or in anger before it starts to get really boring."

NOV 07 AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
ISSUE 544 (VARIANT)

"I have such a personal connection to those four, because in their simplicity their body language brings you in to the essential parts of their character: who they are now, why they are standing here in front of us, how they are responding to their world…

"So you have Spider-Man, who is shot from above looking at his hands, basically wondering what he's done, how he got to the place that all his decisions have brought him…"

"Artistically, I don't have too much fulfillment with this one. I can't say that I really proved anything except for being able to draw a sexy chick in a tight suit. As far as the colors, I find that a bit more remarkable. I like stark contrast, and in this piece I like how the black and white of her costume really contrasts with the bright orange in the background. I have a lot of fun in creating such contrast in backgrounds that are completely monochromatic. Here, the city is covered in the colors that you would never see a city in. There is no lighting situation that would ever cause a city to look like that. But it is definitely the prerogative of an illustrator to play around with that; we have far more freedom than do photographers."



"Most of my covers are complementary in color. Either they're blue-orange, or they're red-green, or they're purple-yellow. I work with those contrasts just because the complementary colors already do most of the work for me. Using my cools against my warms easily establishes a certain atmosphere. If you look at all the Daredevil covers I've painted so far, you'll see that I always put blue into his costume just to cool the costume down. It helps to show a reflective light source and gives more form and definition of volume; if you were to keep it all red, it would just get mundane after awhile."

"I wanted to convey the feeling that these two characters have perhaps just leaped out of a window, so I projected a light source behind them that indicates there is some action that has happened over there that we're not seeing. I tend to do that pretty often – placing light sources outside of the picture – because it gives you the opportunity to entice the imagination of the viewer."

FEB 09 DAREDEVIL ISSUE 114

"This was a cool concept because it was so simple. He's hanging upside down as if he's lost it, with the classic Bullseye card knifing into Daredevil's face. The Bullseye symbol in the background gives the whole thing a unified look. It's the first time that I realized that if you deploy a Bullseye symbol like that, it can also represent Daredevil's sonar. It reinforced with me how much the two characters actually have in common."

"I wrote out in my scribbly, sketchy handwriting a message that says, 'Only death shall part.' In this issue, the Kingpin loses his family to the Hand. The Hand assassins kill off the whole of his new family that he's built up in Spain while in exile. I wanted to avoid the obvious; I didn't want to show the literal killing – like Kingpin holding up a dead child, for instance. I made a choice to convey the emotion on a very subtle level and with the splash of red and the scratches and dirt. This foreshadows the deaths rather than shows them to you."

"A very evocative scene of Daredevil and Kingpin making a pact. After I got the description from Ed, I knew this would make for a very striking image. I think the initial request included the desire for rain in the scene. But I thought it might be better to just pick up the scene after rain had already passed through. That's why the ground is so reflective. I also really wanted to push the perspective in the piece and make the characters relatively small, giving those crosses around them a very looming, imposing nature.

"Ultimately, Kingpin is the major archnemesis of Daredevil. But even so, you can only be the nemesis of somebody if you share a lot of things in common with them. There's a deeper connection than mere confrontation. One cannot live without the other."

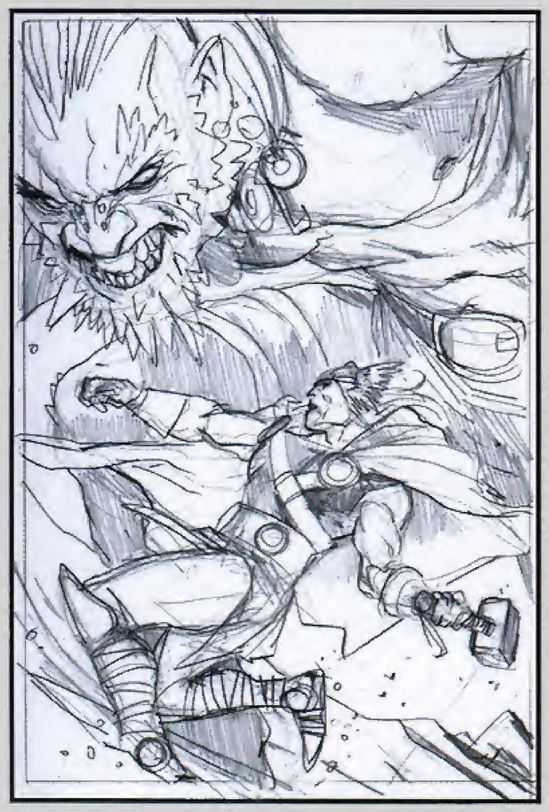
"This one came together rather quickly. After entertaining the idea of a few other concepts, I decided to depict Daredevil in an overwhelming rage. In my mind, it's largely a filler cover. My main intention with it was to make it interesting in the way it's painted, to try and bring out the rough and vulgar qualities and bring it in line with Daredevil's emotional state. It is definitely different than the more polished covers I had been doing."

"I chose an abstract way of interpreting the yin and yang, with the female power of the yin on top of the male power of the yang. I really wanted to show Lady Bullseye being in charge, to subvert the symbolism by showing the formidably powerful Kingpin as the one who is in danger here."

SEP 09 DAREDEVIL ISSUE 500

"This gatefold cover was my final bow with Daredevil. Altogether it must have been a week from the initial sketch till the final painting, making it the longest time I have ever spent painting something. As far back as eighteen months before I completed this, I knew this milestone was coming and my concept was to do it as big as possible and go out with a bang.

JUN 08 THOR: AGES OF THUNDER



"I really liked the covers of the one-shots: *Ages of Thunder, Reign of Blood*, and *Man of War*. In them, Thor is a bit more removed from continuity and the costume shows it, as it is more oriented toward the classical stories of Thor that I grew up with. You can see it also in the nature of his foes: These aren't the typical 'super hero' Thor covers. With this picture, he's standing on top of a Frost Giant that was just slain, evoking the classical David versus Goliath theme, except in a Norse context."

"The editors gave me the setup, that it was supposed to be the characters of Magik, Black Knight, Scarlet Witch and Sister Grimm (of teen comic *Runaways*) in four iconic shots. They also added that they wanted to have each of the characters represent a particular element. All the other designs that I added to the mix were my inspiration, trying to figure out the best way to represent air, the best way to represent fire, and so on."

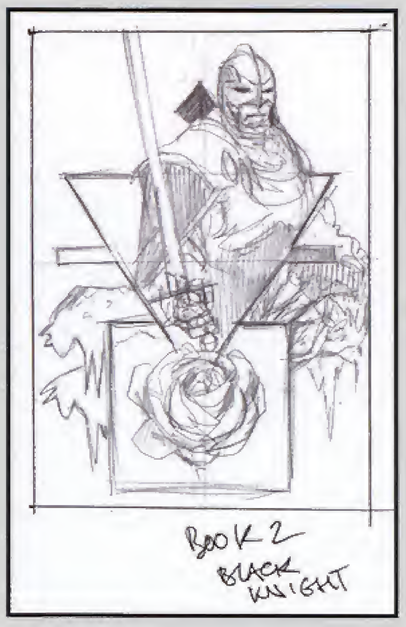
"(Editor) Warren Simons had a particular scene in mind that he wanted shown on the cover, which was based on a Walter Simonson Thor story from 20 years ago. *["Like a Bat Out of Hell" from Thor #362.]*

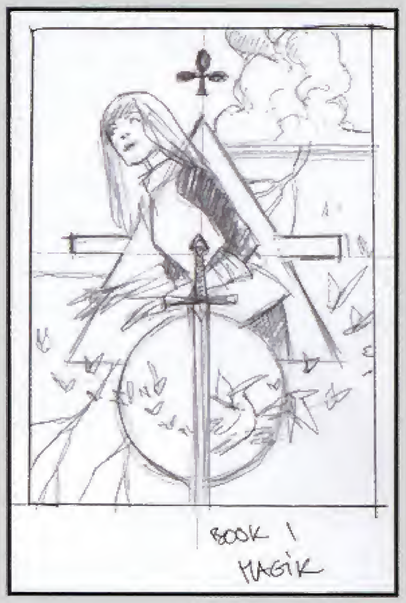
"You can just imagine this as the cover art to some '80s heavy metal album. Everything about this cover is cheesy to me; I really feel it speaks for itself. But I know a *lot* of fans loved it. I guess there are a lot of people that are into cheesiness!

"When I was growing up in a rural part of Germany, I didn't have a lot of art books to collect because there was not a comic book store where I lived until I was 14, so the only fantasy influences that I got early on were from heavy metal album covers. And because my brother was listening to that crap, I would sit in his room and just stare at those covers full of overladen Viking warriors fighting each other with lightning crashing down around them. Pretty much every cliché that you could possibly imagine about Norse mythology always seemed to make it onto those covers. I really wanted to recreate something that had the same kind of feel to it, so that was my inspiration."

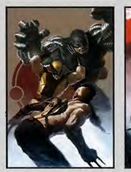
'What can I say, this truly is a work of art. It has all the drama and grandeur worthy of the Asgardians. Marko's rendering on everything from the flesh and hair to the metal and fur is just astounding! His light sourcing is so luminous that it looks lit from within – not to mention dead on. One of his best works to date." – **Chris Allo**

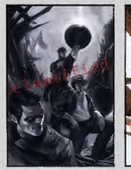
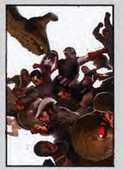
BOOK 3
SCARLET
WITCH


BOOK 2
BLACK
KNIGHT


BOOK 1
MAGIK

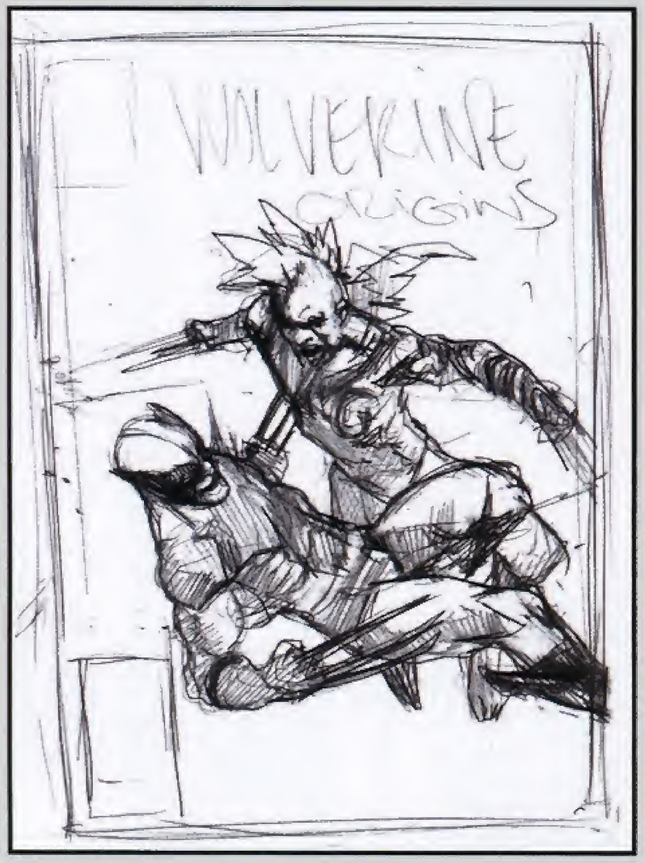
CHAPTER 06
WOLVERINE



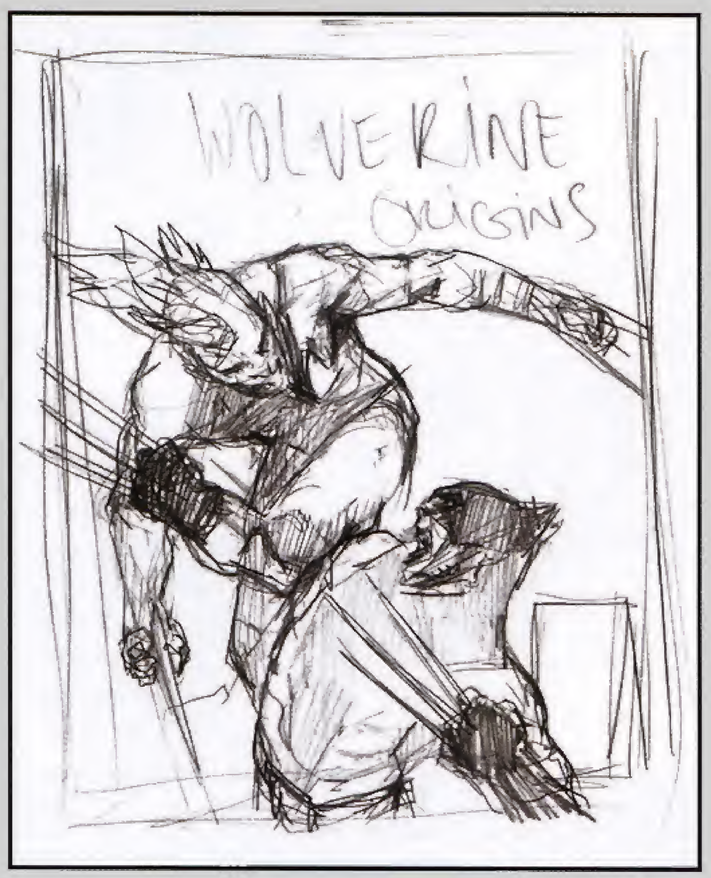



Wolverine's the best there is at what he does, and what he does is appear in lots of comic books! As a member of the Uncanny X-Men and X-Force, and headline attraction in various other monthly titles that bear his name, the character now rivals Spider-Man as the most ubiquitously popular Marvel hero. One of the these titles has, in the last three years, begun to chart out the vast expanses of Marvel's most closely kept secret – Wolverine's dark, traumatic past. Daniel Way's Wolverine: Origins explores the continuum of Logan's life from his birth to his present, exposing the sundry dark figures behind his manipulation. During his journey, he's found a son he never new he had sired (or, perhaps to put it more pointedly, the son found him – claws extended!) and he's had to reconcile himself to a century long life full of despicable commissions of violence and murder. One of these episodes was a reminiscence on Wolverine's wartime activities in World War II. It was during this time that Marko took the role as Origins cover artist, whereupon he highlighted the marvelous team-up between Wolverine, Captain America and Bucky with excitement, action, and the drama befitting that momentous period in world history.

MARKO "I was a big X-Men fan when I first started reading comics, but believe it or not I never had an emotional connection to Wolverine. I don't know why. I guess it's because I don't have a Napoleon complex or something. I'm pretty tall myself, and I don't suffer from any complexes in that direction."



"Joe Quesada's design of Daken, Wolverine's son, is a good clean design. It's not overdone or too complicated, but at the same time has a certain iconographic form to it. Daken is definitely readable from afar, which is important, because when you reduce the character to an inch or so on a comic book page, his identity and personality still has to translate to the reader.



"I find that giving a character a tattoo is really costume enough. That's something that you can work with, and Joe did it in a good way."

OCT 07 WOLVERINE: ORIGINS ISSUE 16

"World War II is a very iconic period in human history – maybe the most iconic period in human history – because nothing has ever represented evil in a more insidious way than the manner in which the Nazi regime represented themselves with their graphic design and iconography. Whenever you slap a swastika on something, you can really make the cover look evil."

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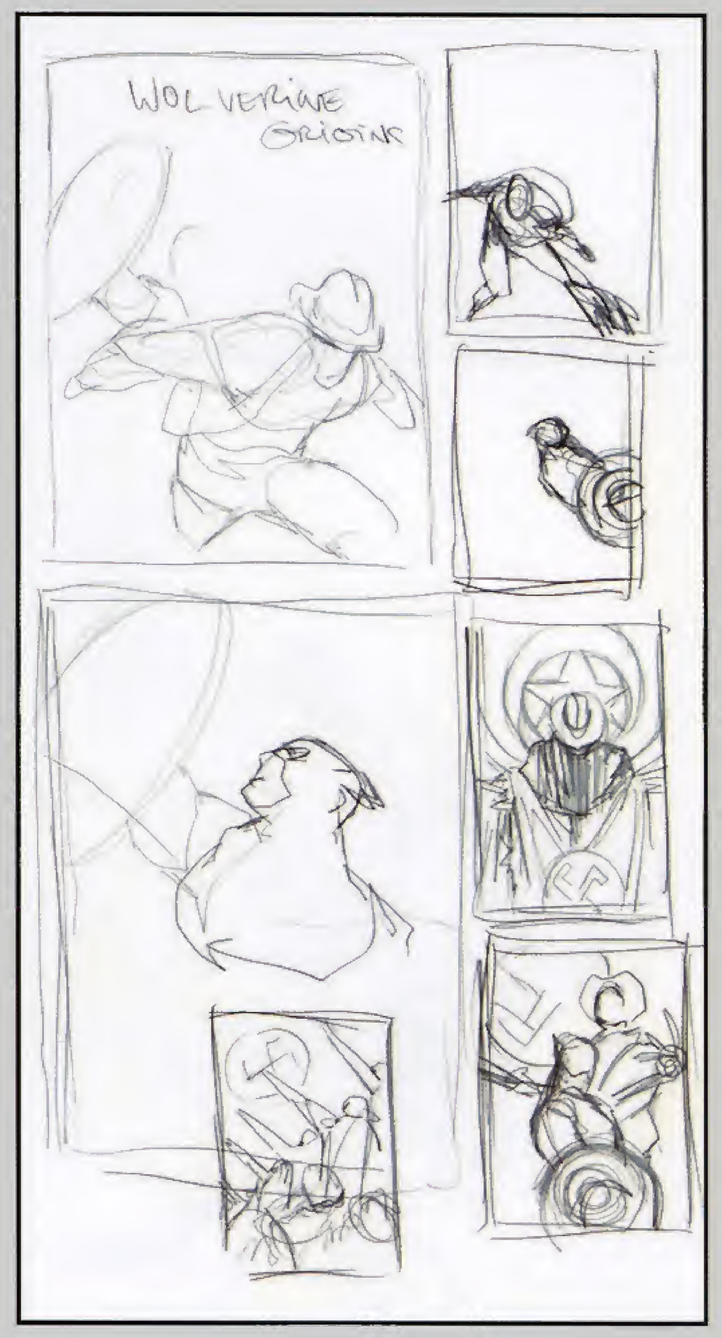
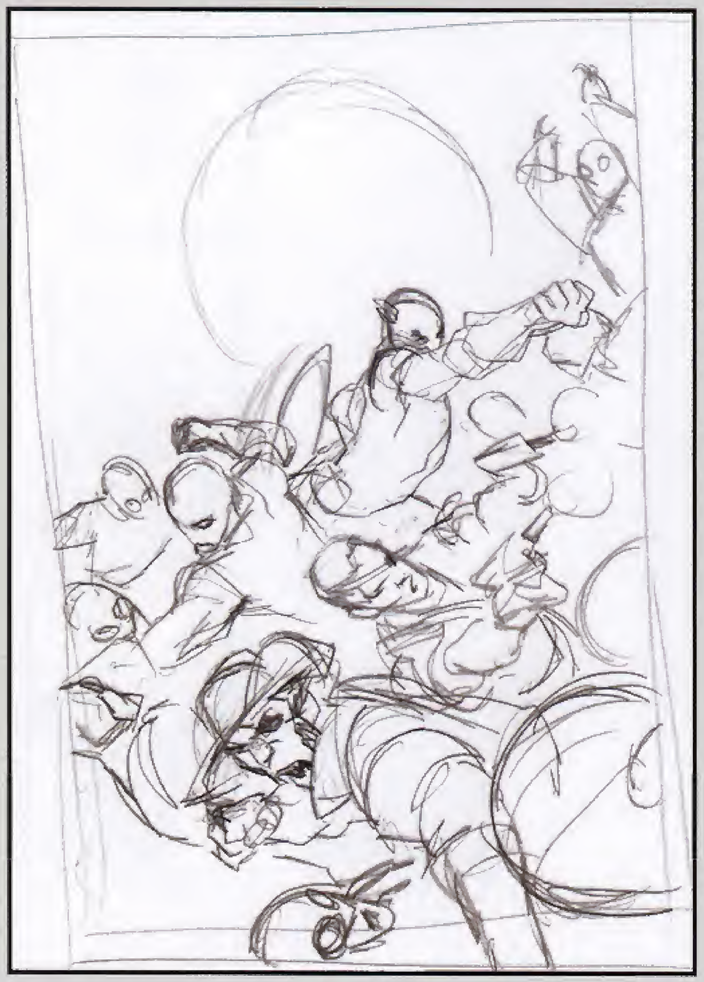
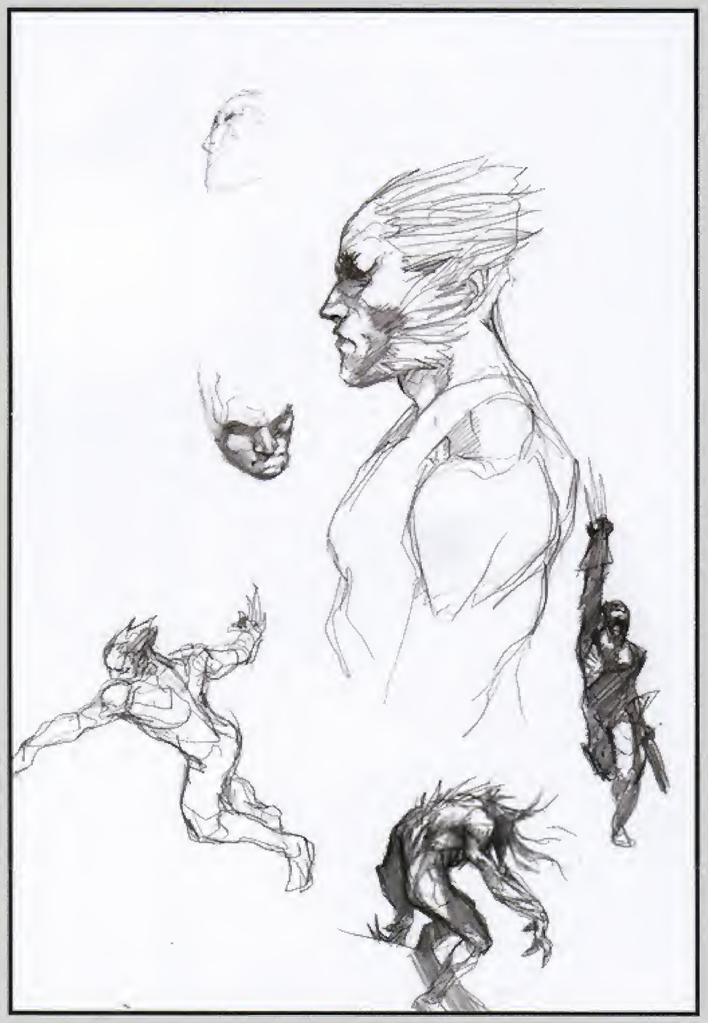
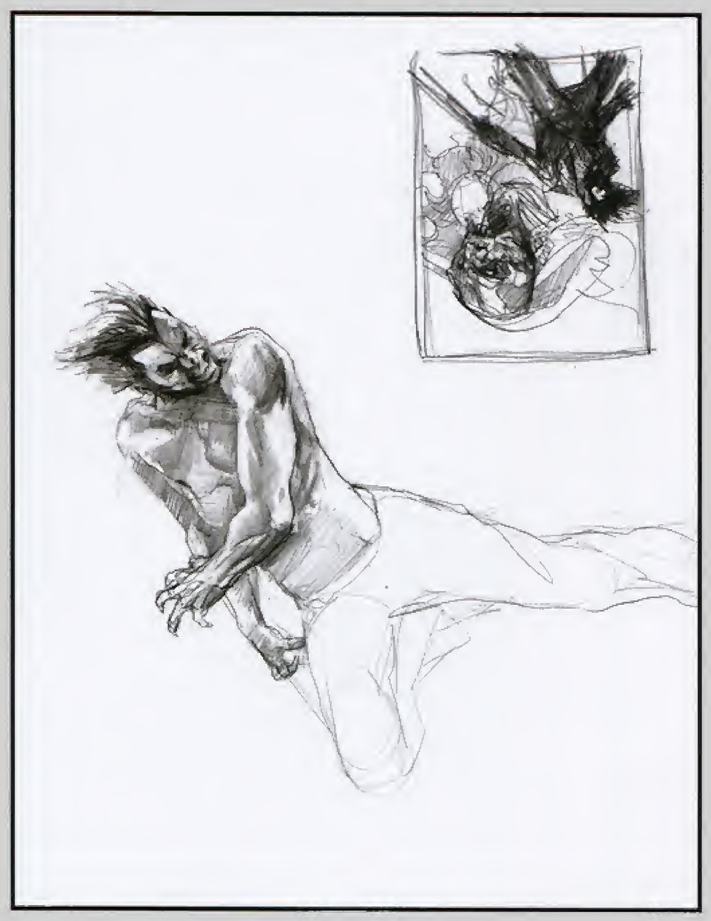

WOLVERINE
ORIGINS

DEC 07 WOLVERINE: ORIGINS ISSUE 18



FEB 08 WOLVERINE: ORIGINS ISSUE 20





CHAPTER 07
SPIDER-MAN: ONE MORE DAY

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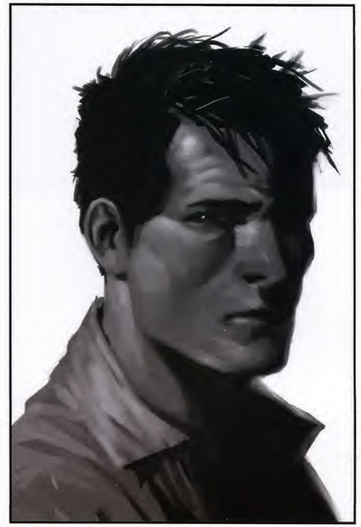

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"That is an essential part of being a good illustrator, revealing dimensions of a person's soul through body language. It's what you can do with a character when he's not engaged in action; so many covers are full of action, which is nice, but you can only draw so many faces that are grinning or in anger before it starts to get really boring."

NOV 07 AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
ISSUE 544 (VARIANT)

"I have such a personal connection to those four, because in their simplicity their body language brings you in to the essential parts of their character: who they are now, why they are standing here in front of us, how they are responding to their world…

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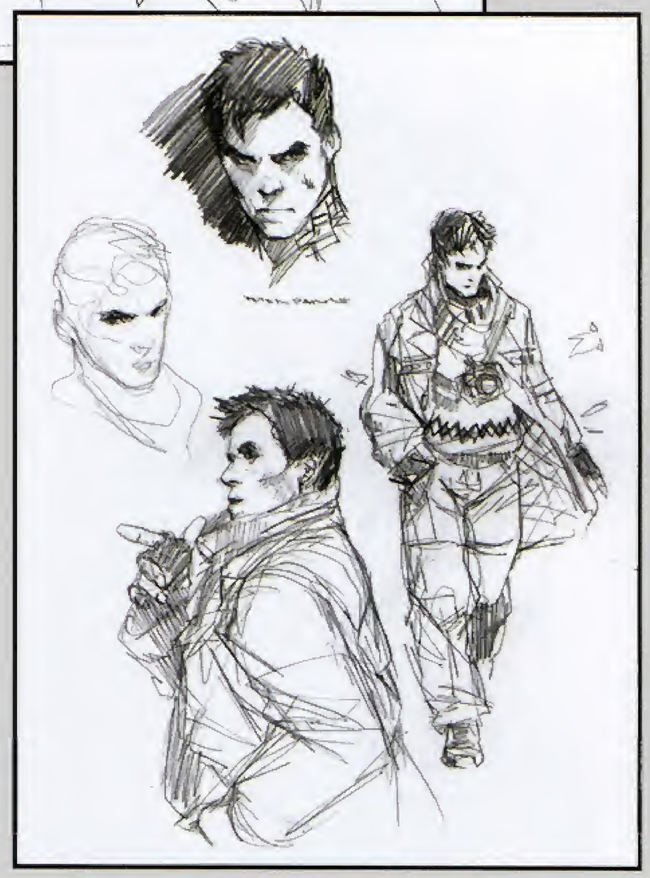
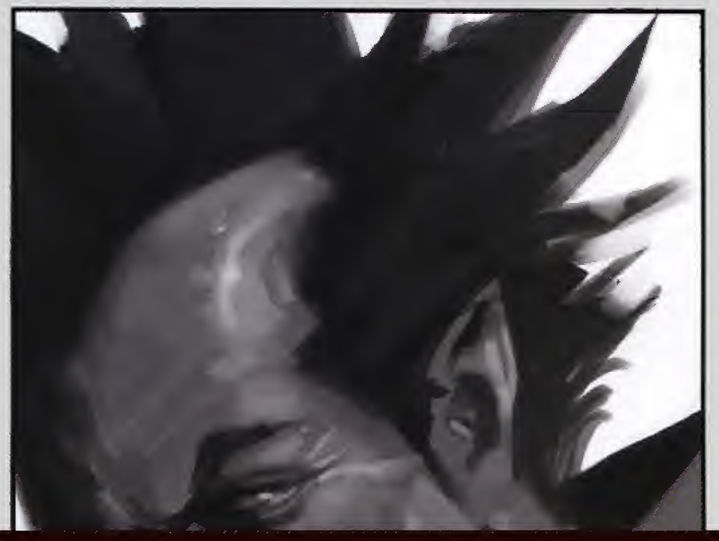


"And then you look at the Peter Parker image, which shows him clenching his fists, realizing the choices he's made have been catastrophic and that he needs to do something about it. His face is almost completely shadowed on one side, which reinforces the tension inside of him. There's only a little shimmer of light hitting his eyes, so it's not the Peter Parker with a happy disposition you are used to seeing – it's a very somber and very thoughtful Peter Parker, somebody who's been more or less pushed into a corner and has to make some bold choices."

NOV 07 FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN
ISSUE 544 (VARIANT)

"The next one, Mary Jane, is in a stance that implies acceptance. When you can't change things anymore, where the only thing you can do is just clasp your hands together and stare into nothingness for a while to rethink what's happening around you. Again, that stark lighting completely shadows half of her face on one side, which is just pushing the mood into this somberness, into this helplessness, into this anxiety and anticipation of what's to come, what is next to be revealed..."



THE AVENGERS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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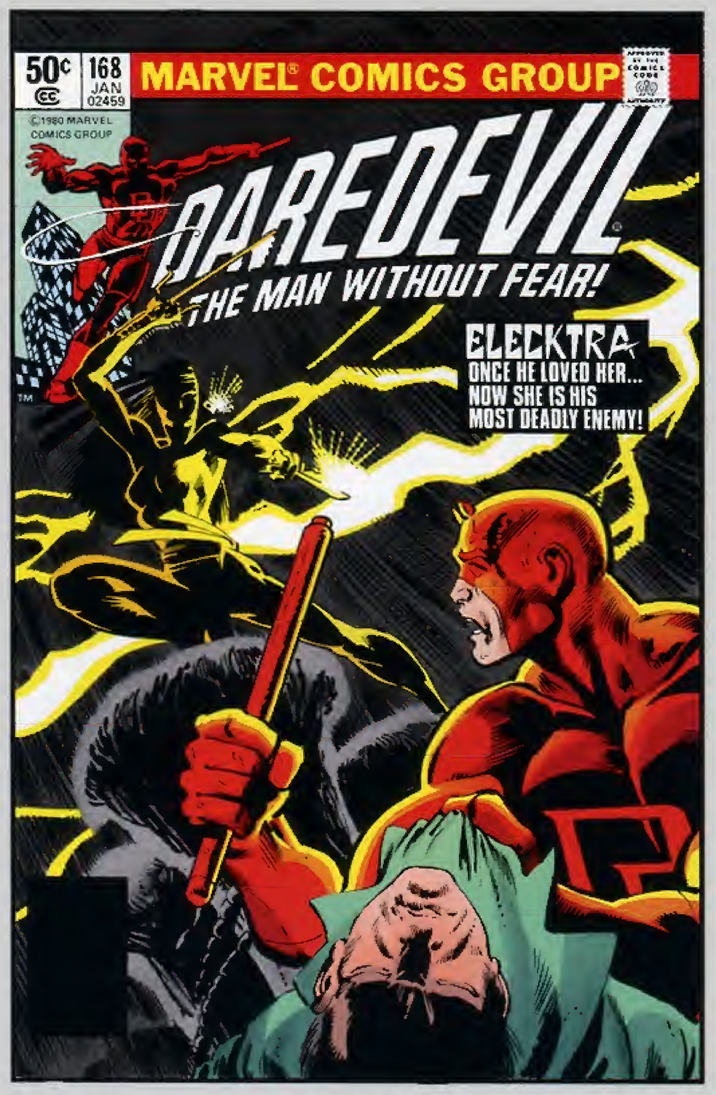
CAPTAIN AMERICA LIVES AGAIN!
ALSO IN THIS SENSATIONAL ISSUE...
SUB-MARINER

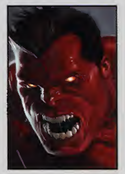


Original cover art to *Daredevil #168* by Frank Miller.

"These religious, prophetic aspects of Ghost Rider were all part of my initial attempts at outlining where I wanted to go with the character – and I really wanted to even go deeper with it – but it didn't fit the story that the writer was telling at that point. He wanted to go for more of a comedic route, and all the seriousness that I wanted to bring into the covers didn't really line up with that."

MAY 08 GHOST RIDER ISSUE 21

CHAPTER 11
HULK



In 2009, the Hulk is not a character Marko is known for drawing. Assembled in this chapter are the small handful of covers in which he's been able to delineate the massive form of Marvel's most misunderstood monster, a hodgepodge of one-shots, variants and magazine covers. Despite the small body of work, it is some of the artist's most heartfelt work. Finding a deep connection with this iconic character was the easy part for Marko; all he had to do was crack open his first Hulk comic when he was a kid to feel an abiding empathy for the pathos inside the monster. To this day, it's a dimension of the Hulk the artist uses to channel his drawings, a dimension easily missed by all those who stick with their notions of the Hulk who merely plays the bumbling, dumb, idiot savant of overwhelming violence. Maybe one day Marko will get his shot at a regular Hulk run. Until then, the Hulk isn't a character Marko is known for drawing. Yet…

MARKO "The Hulk is a creature of raw power. So when I draw the Hulk, the question is raised to me about how I portray that raw power. But I ask the question a different way: What is that raw power good for? It has never given the Hulk peace. The power that I show in Hulk's figure is just an estimation of that raw power being worth absolutely nothing. Power alone is not a means to an end. It's not going to make the world a better place, but it makes it a lot more sad for those who have to live with it."

"I thrilled at reading the Hulk when I was a child, so totally connecting to his character. It's such a beautiful paradox when you think about how he is so strong – the strongest there is, so strong you cannot stop him – while at the same time he is unable to find a friend. The lesson underpinning his character seemed to be that no matter how mighty you are, it doesn't automatically make for a better life. The Hulk is such an unbelievably tortured character: he's never given his rest, he's always on the run, he's constantly traveling the world. He searches forever always trying to find a place of peace for himself, always trying to find a cure for his condition."

"When you compare Iron Man to Hulk, for example – Tony Stark has got his tower, his billions in the bank, and all the hot chicks. Or if you look at Captain America, he is one who is loved and respected by everyone. They have their own flaws, but largely what they represent is what is most desired by others in real life – they have a respite from what makes them flawed. They are not perfectly flawed like the Hulk, who has always represented the greatness of a hero far better than other characters: the imperfect god that is constantly striving for his own betterment. This is the essence of the character that always kept me engaged with him. I would draw and paint the Hulk all day long."

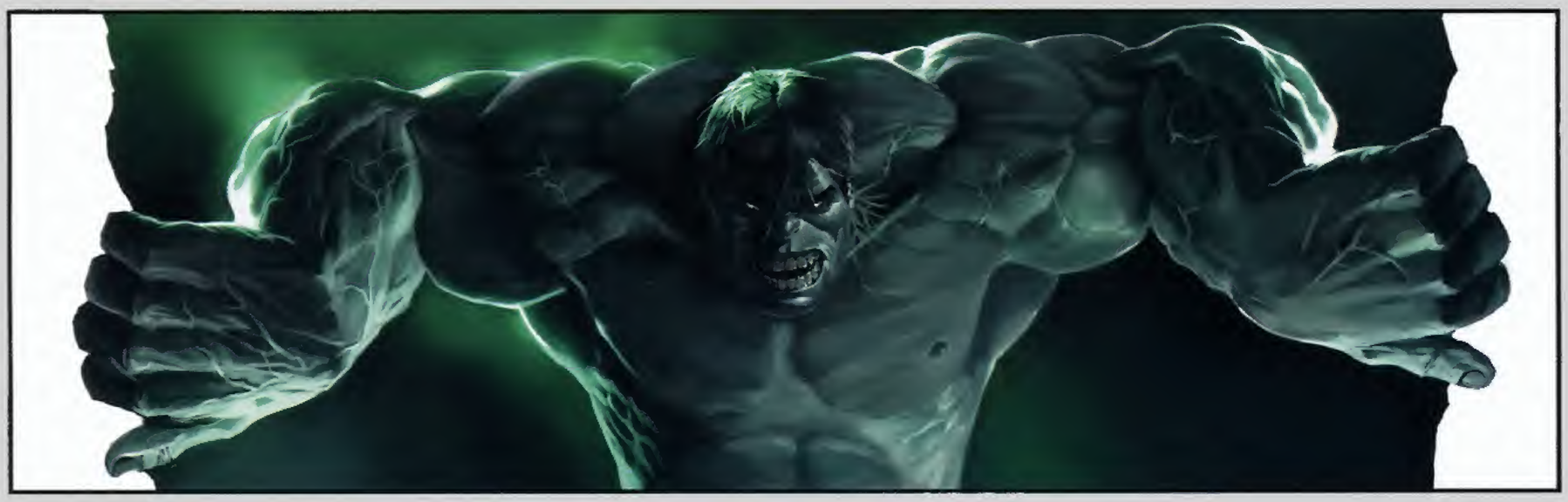
APR 08 **HULK**
ISSUE 2 (VARIANT)

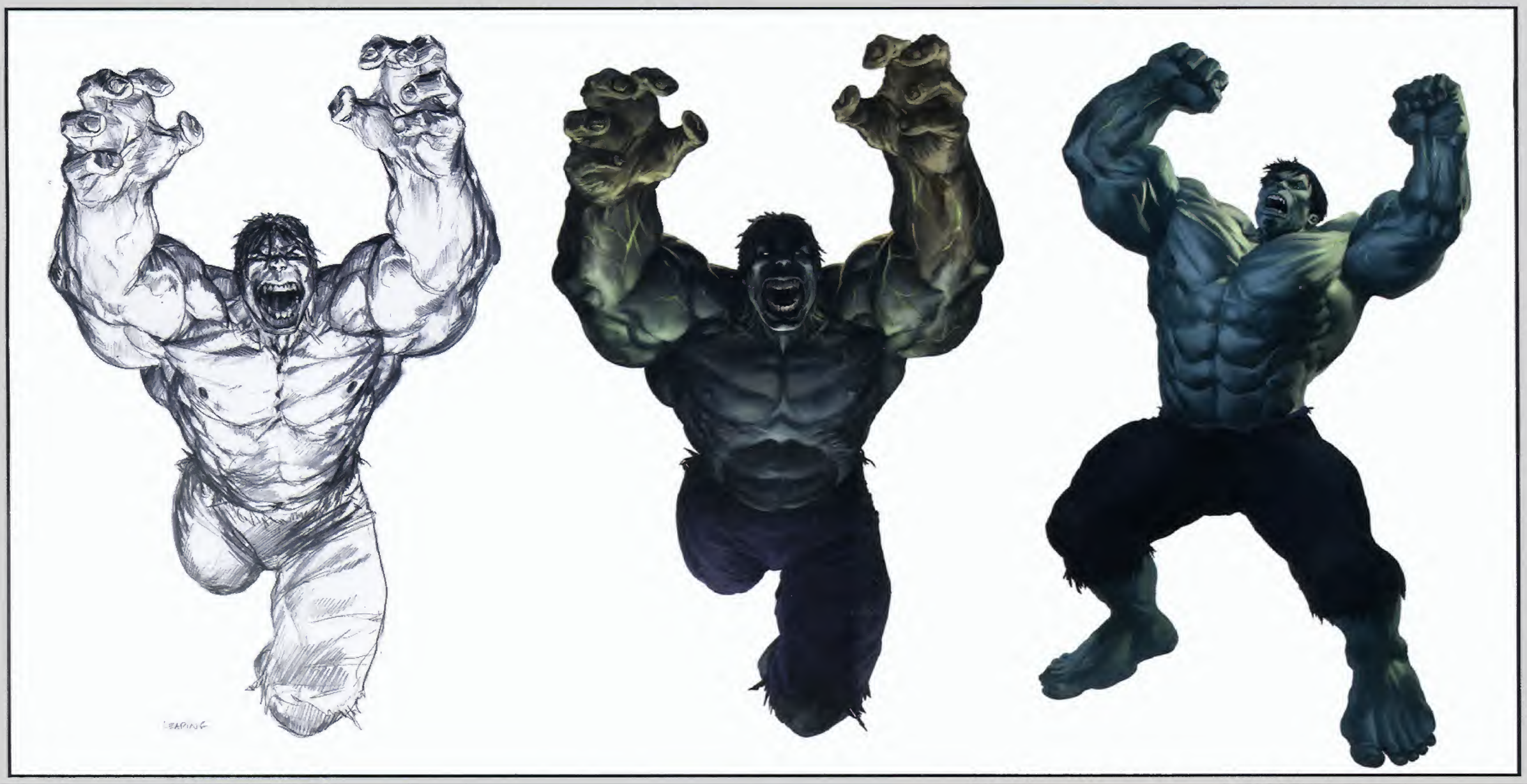
"It's a pleasure painting him as realistically as possible. If you look at my version of the Hulk, it's a little different from a lot of other artists who are either trying to make him more primitive – sometimes a lot more primitive – or a lot more exaggerated. Even when having to contend with depicting his massive size, I work to give him some sort of realism – depicting him as a huge human being on steroids, perhaps, or giving his face a wide variety of expressions."

"His larger-than-life nature always works best when you put him into context with something else. For example, on the Wizard cover I painted him holding up a black flag with all the fallen heroes around him. Or the cover where he's going up against Hercules, it gives you a chance to take in all that sheer mass and realize there's nobody bigger than him."

"The character definitely translates so many essential human conditions on so many different levels; it's one of the few characters where I could easily see him venture into literature. He has all the aspects of Frankenstein buried inside, he's got the Jekyll and Hyde complex going on, his story narrative includes the classical Buddhist search for a place of peace and meaning. Those buttons aren't pushed in comics enough.

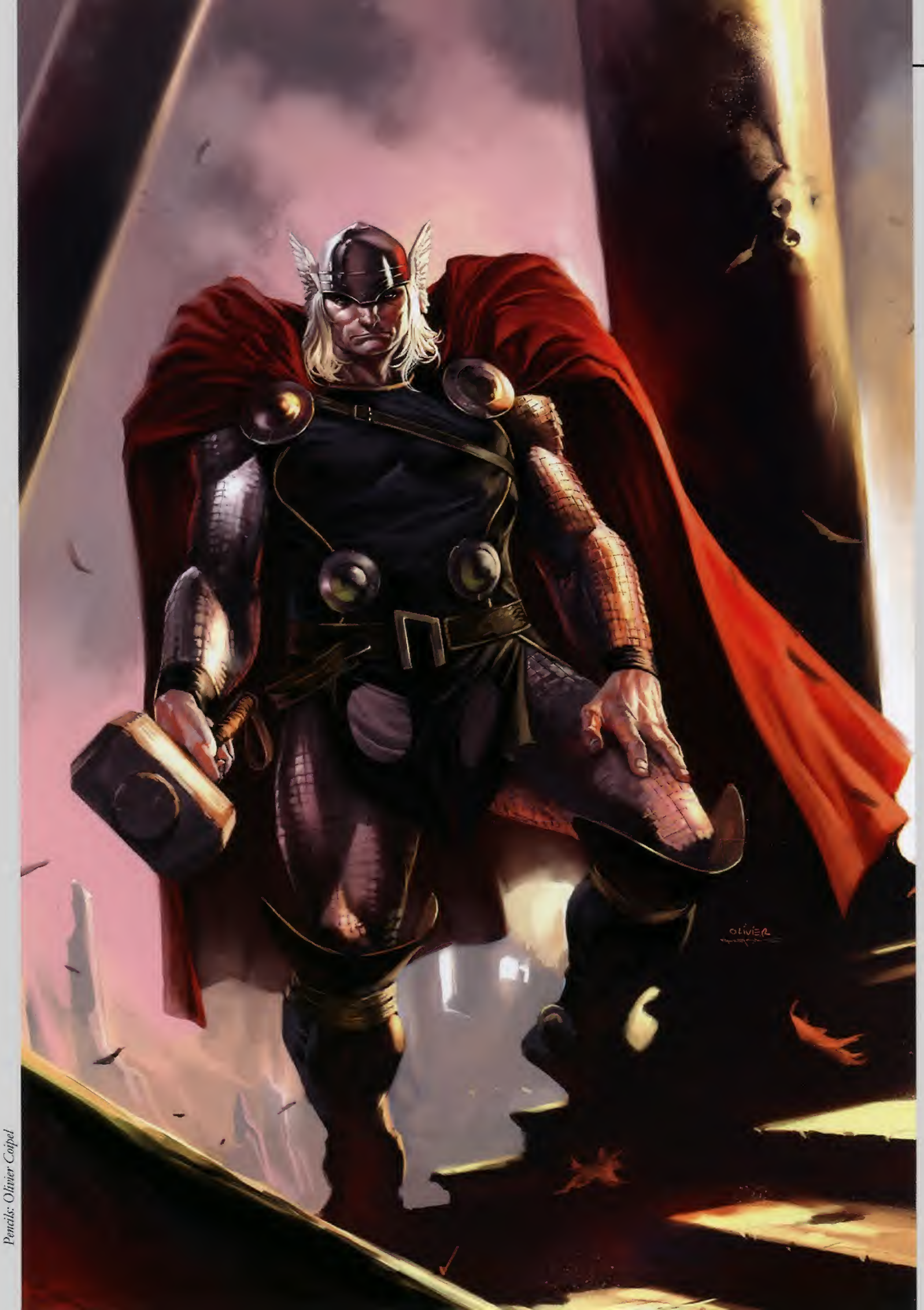
"But it goes even further – it goes into the back story of Bruce Banner having been witness to his father murdering his mother and having to bury that trauma deep inside. With that in mind, the Hulk is merely a manifestation of the rage that he felt when he was a child, and the gamma radiation wasthe trigger that releases the rage. I really think that it's one of the deepest franchises Marvel has."





"These are my concept designs for the *Incredible Hulk* film, my complete vision before the process took over and changed them."

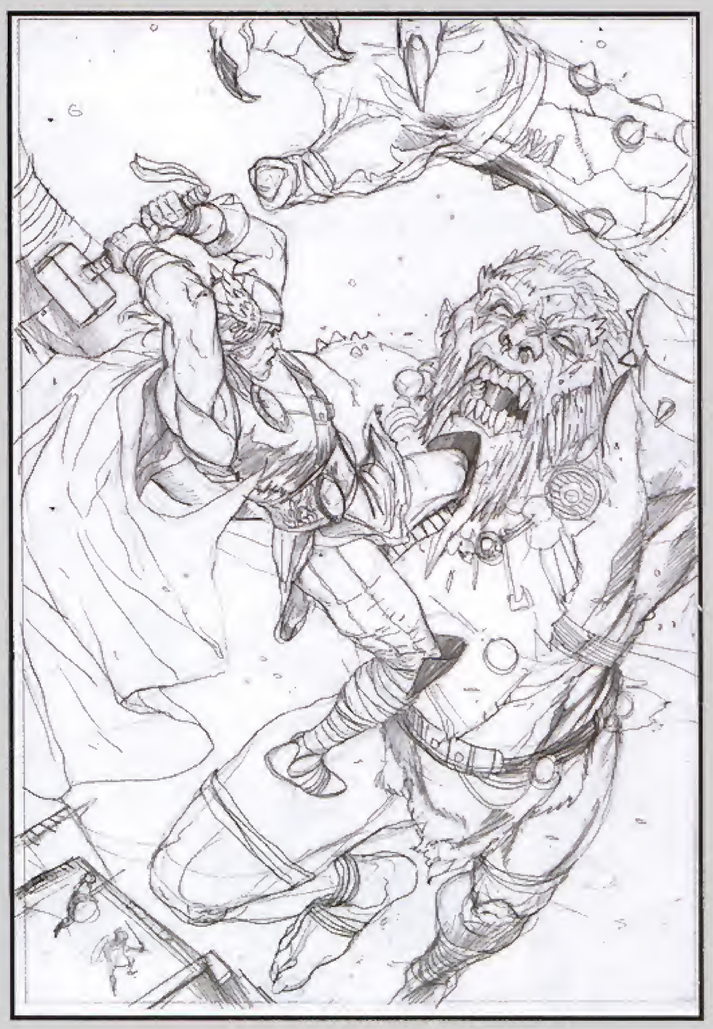
"Being associated with thunder is, I think, much more scary than being associated with the sun. A storm is largely unpredictable, especially in the distant past when the Norse fables were first being constructed; people must have thought storms represented something beyond mere changes in weather. They didn't have the scientific knowledge to know how it was that the clouds began appearing, or why the storm was coming and the thunder rolling. They must have considered these events to be the powerful anger of the gods."



Pencils: Olivier Coipel

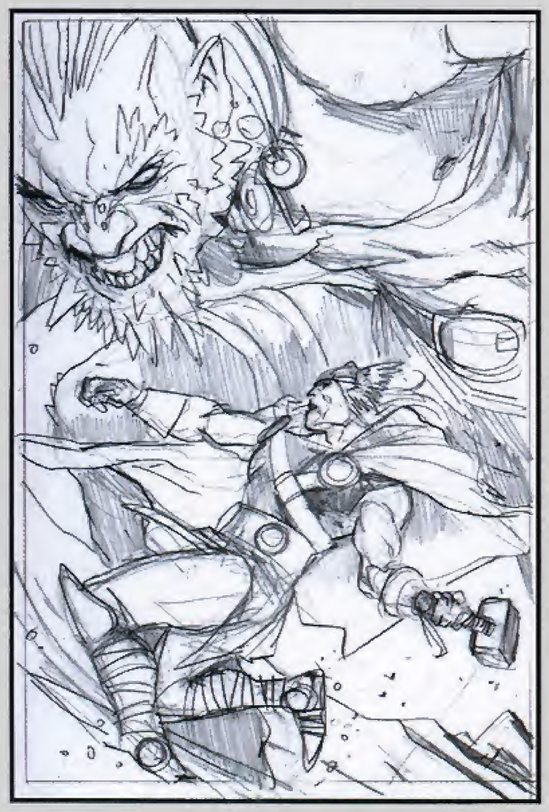
"Painting over Olivier Coipel's pencils on this variant cover was definitely a fun project, and I was able to do it three more times over other artists' work as well. I didn't have to think about drawing at all. I received their already completed pencils and could spend all my time with a sharp focus on the quality of the painting and how to make it as expressive as possible. I enlarged the initial figure, switched the perspective a bit, moved stuff around, and I laid in elements of the background and the foreground. I still wanted to keep Olivier's pencils visible through the painting process and not destroy the design sense he created, but really make it an amalgamation of both of our talents."

"From an artistic standpoint, it was a really cheap trick to get this cover done, because there's nothing easier to paint than lightning. It's just flat, white color with a little bit of airbrush on top, and you've got instant lighting. You add your jagged lines and the cover is practically done."



"This was initially planned to be the cover of the *Ages of Thunder* one-shot, but at the time I was painting it, nobody was fully aware of the plot details of that story. As it happened, it wound up being unusable for *Ages of Thunder*, which was set in a completely different time outside of the current series and didn't have Thor wearing his contemporary costume. Just as I found out this information, I had finished the piece! It has never been used for anything, but we may see it used as a cover for something down the line."

JUN 08 THOR: AGES OF THUNDER



"I really liked the covers of the one-shots: *Ages of Thunder, Reign of Blood*, and *Man of War*. In them, Thor is a bit more removed from continuity and the costume shows it, as it is more oriented toward the classical stories of Thor that I grew up with. You can see it also in the nature of his foes: These aren't the typical 'super hero' Thor covers. With this picture, he's standing on top of a Frost Giant that was just slain, evoking the classical David versus Goliath theme, except in a Norse context."

"The Reign of Blood cover grabs me because of the flood of skeleton warriors that are raining down over Thor, and it seems like he's fighting a wall that is collapsing on top of him. I like the composition in that one a lot."

JAN 09 **THOR: MAN OF WAR**

"My favorite of the series is *Man of War*, which was the last of the one-shots that I did. In particular I love the effect of sunlight reflecting off the snow. I just imagined what it would look like if they were really fighting on top of a mountain in broad daylight with snowdrifts all around them, with the light reflecting back on their white fur, their pale skin and blonde hair. I really had a lot of fun with my painting on this cover in terms of how I used my strokes and how fluidly it all came together as an overall image."

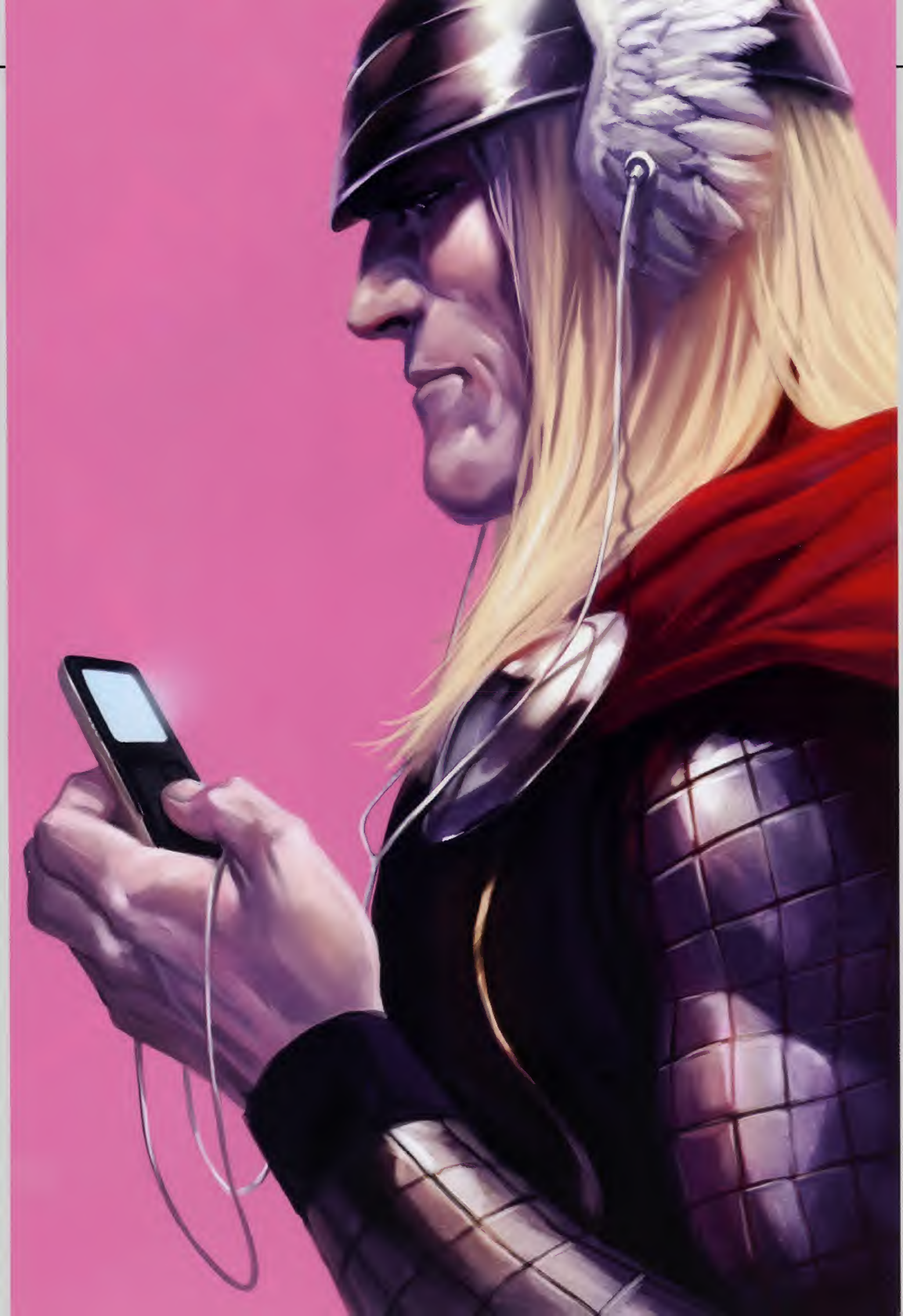
"(Editor) Warren Simons had a particular scene in mind that he wanted shown on the cover, which was based on a Walter Simonson Thor story from 20 years ago. *["Like a Bat Out of Hell" from Thor #362.]*

"You can just imagine this as the cover art to some '80s heavy metal album. Everything about this cover is cheesy to me; I really feel it speaks for itself. But I know a *lot* of fans loved it. I guess there are a lot of people that are into cheesiness!

"When I was growing up in a rural part of Germany, I didn't have a lot of art books to collect because there was not a comic book store where I lived until I was 14, so the only fantasy influences that I got early on were from heavy metal album covers. And because my brother was listening to that crap, I would sit in his room and just stare at those covers full of overladen Viking warriors fighting each other with lightning crashing down around them. Pretty much every cliché that you could possibly imagine about Norse mythology always seemed to make it onto those covers. I really wanted to recreate something that had the same kind of feel to it, so that was my inspiration."

'What can I say, this truly is a work of art. It has all the drama and grandeur worthy of the Asgardians. Marko's rendering on everything from the flesh and hair to the metal and fur is just astounding! His light sourcing is so luminous that it looks lit from within – not to mention dead on. One of his best works to date." – **Chris Allo**

"This was a real pain to paint because Thor is so unbelievably small in the picture. It was such a struggle to give him form and volume in the limited amount of space that I had to work with and still not over-render it. From a painting standpoint, it was a really tough assignment to do."



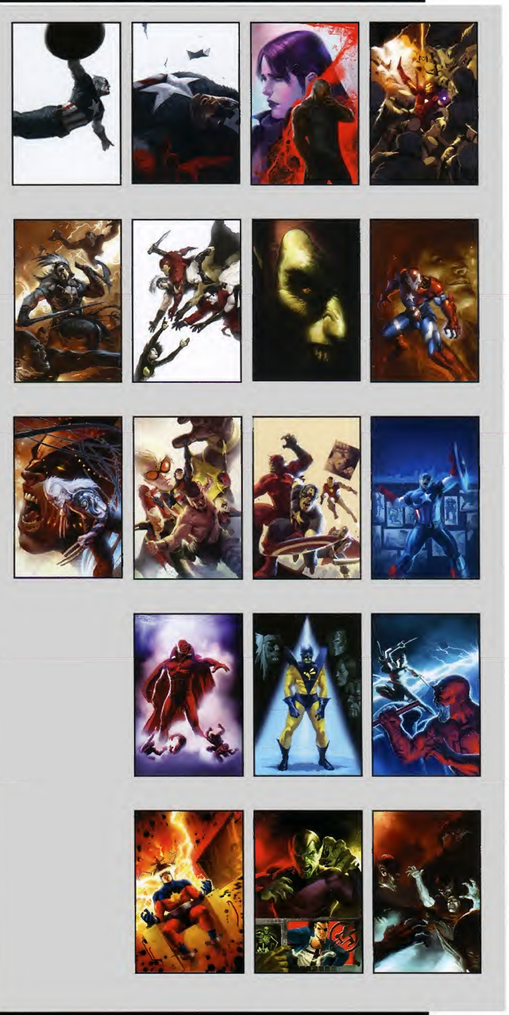
"I must give credit to my friend Andrew Jones for this because he's actually the one who came up with the idea. He was visiting over at my apartment just after I got the assignment for the cover of #601, which came with the request to illustrate something which played upon the idea of Thor leaving Asgard and becoming more a part of the mortal world. I sketched out the cover that was eventually used on the regular edition of the issue, but I wasn't really happy with it.

"So I turned to Andrew. Since we used to closely work together for so long, I asked him what he would do if he were in charge, and he said, 'Why don't you draw Thor listening to an iPod?' And I cracked up so hard! I didn't believe anybody at Marvel would buy it – I was sure they would think I was going crazy, but I still thought it would be good to at least give them a laugh, so I drew it. They loved it so much that they actually asked me to do a variant of it. By the end of the process, it really drove home the point that Thor was leaving Asgard!"

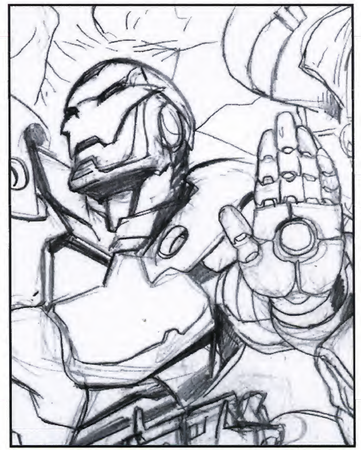
JUL 09 THOR ISSUE 602

"Beta Ray Bill is such a *weird* character. Everything about him is odd: He looks like a horse demon with three fingers, a hammer and a helmet. I've never in my life had a connection with the character. On the other hand, from an artistic standpoint I always love tackling characters that I have no previous exposure to. It's exciting because of the challenge."

CHAPTER 10
AVENGERS



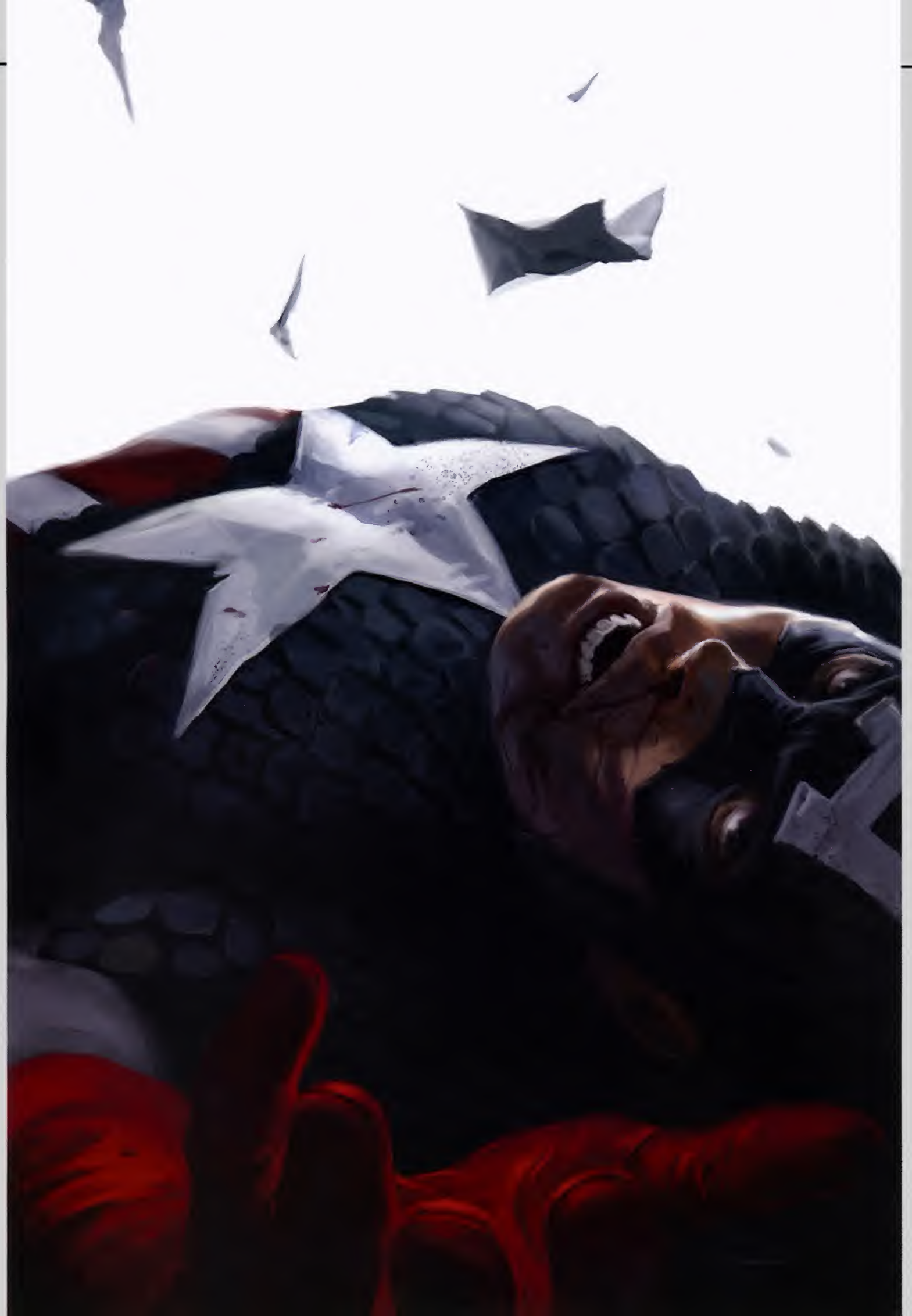
By the time of Marvel's 2008 event, Secret Invasion, *the heroes of the Marvel Universe either had been replaced by Skrull doppelgangers – or thought to have been replaced. It was a time of great disorder and paranoia, with the Avengers at the crucible of it all, but it wasn't just a concern for the comic book good guys! Marko must have thought he had been kidnapped by Skrulls as well, as his desire to create new designs and concepts was temporarily hijacked by a series of homages to classic Marvel covers – all adorned with Skrullish new textures – that topped eight issues of Mighty Avengers. (The original cover art by Messrs. Kirby, Buscema, Miller and more are set next to Marko's contemporary renditions in the back of this chapter.) Still, one gets a sense of Marko's approach to characters like Captain America, Iron Man, and writer Brian Michael Bendis' multiple cadres of Avengers in the assemblage of variant and one-off covers gathered here. His work is moving, innovative, and ultimately, heroic – at a perfect narrative pitch with the life and times of a team that has always been at the soul of what Marvel does best: tell stories.*

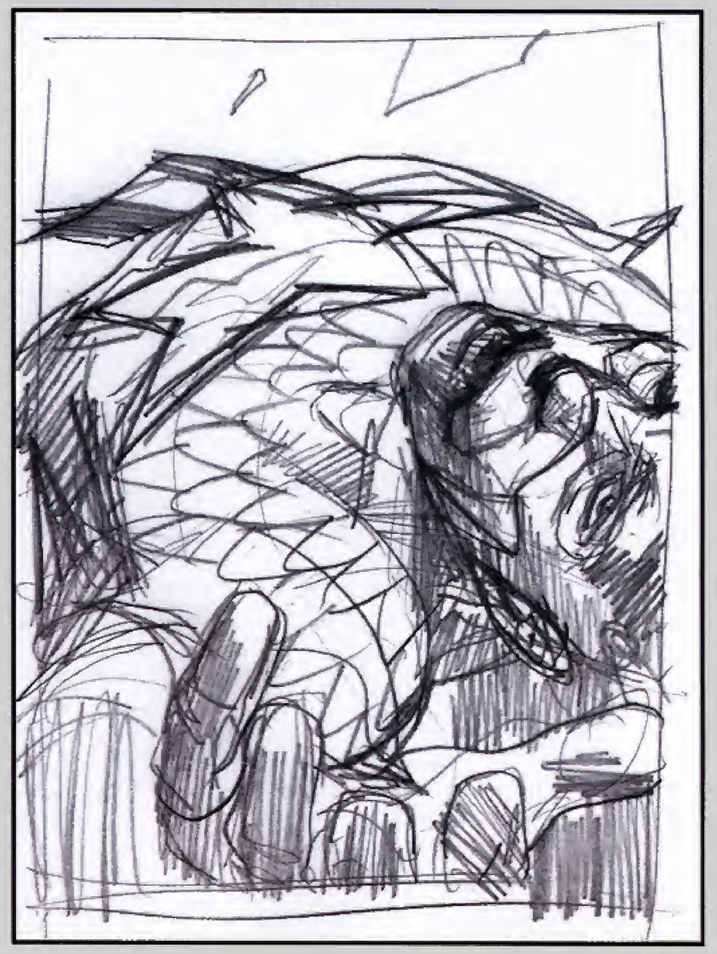


MARKO "I was really stoked about being able to paint the roster of the Mighty Avengers. I think as a group they had the most perfect color scheme of all groups, ever. They're all either black and yellow, or red and black, or red and yellow. Those are their three colors throughout the entire book."

APR 07 CAPTAIN AMERICA
ISSUE 25 (UK VARIANT)

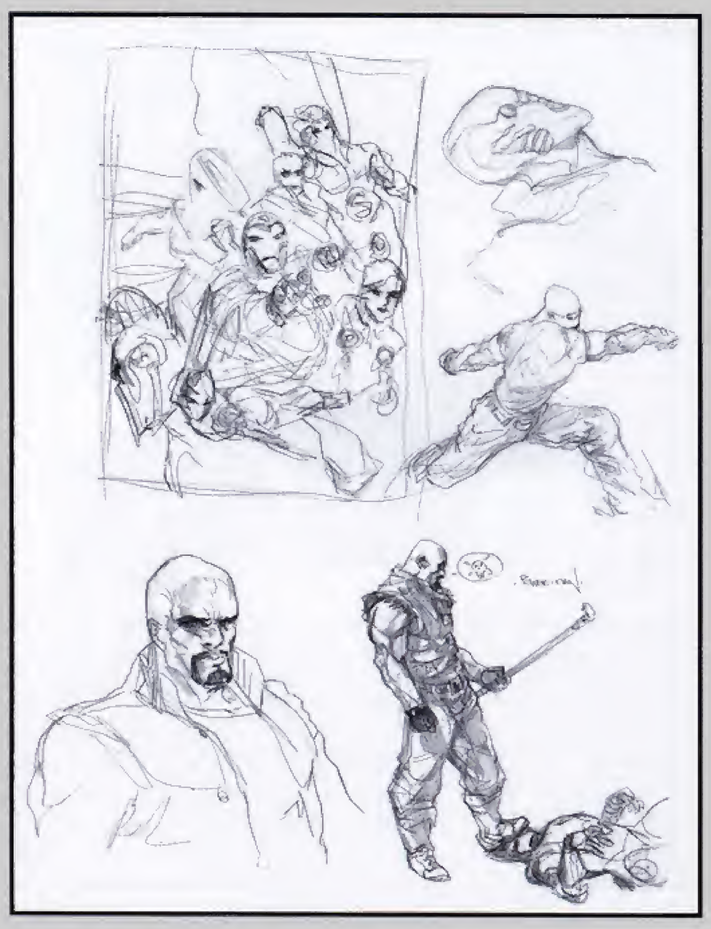
"I painted that shortly before Captain America died. And I had no clue – *no clue* – about the story line at that point. I just wanted to paint my interpretation of Captain America. I was sitting around with the weekend off, and I felt like playing around with colors and forms, and I came out of that with *my* personal vision of a Captain America cover. I shared the cover with Chris Allo and a couple of other guys, offering it in case they wanted to use it for anything, and they came back to me and asked me if I knew about the death of Captain America, or if anyone had told me about it. Everybody was surprised that my coincidental painting had captured the theme that they would be able to be use on the *Captain America #25* cover. They offered it to the British market as a variant and so it went from a weekend experiment to a published cover almost overnight."



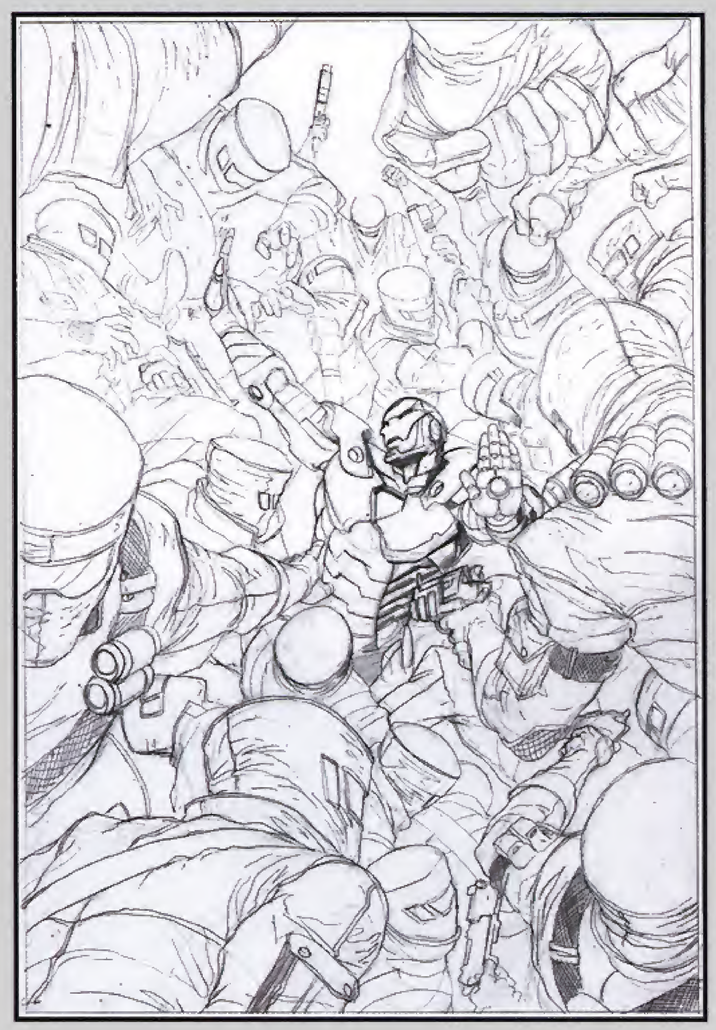


"In contrast with the UK variant, I knew all the details of Captain America's death by the time I developed this cover. Panini, the German licenser of Marvel, was doing a collected edition of all the Captain America stories leading up to his death, and they asked me if I could do a striking image of him dying. That's what I gave them: a close-up of him lying on the stairs bleeding out of his nose and his mouth, his eyes fixed on the viewer. It's the death stare of the hero. The perspective in the shot was something very complicated to do, especially with the foreshortening of his hand reaching forward. I added traces of paper falling in the background to add some more dynamics, and I wanted to keep the figure mostly shadowed with just a little rim of light shining on him.

"I use white here because it's a clean color, it gave me the opportunity to make an image read completely differently than if I was just putting black in the background. Black would have just killed the entire image; it would have been such an obvious choice."



"To represent the breakup of Luke Cage and Jessica Jones, I designed a split image. The reason I layered in all these graphs and stats is because I wanted to show the mathematics of a relationship, how most of the time it's bloody and splits apart after a while because it doesn't add up, so to speak. It was more of a symbolic way to describe the breakup, showing all the different calculations in which they could possibly be separated from each other."



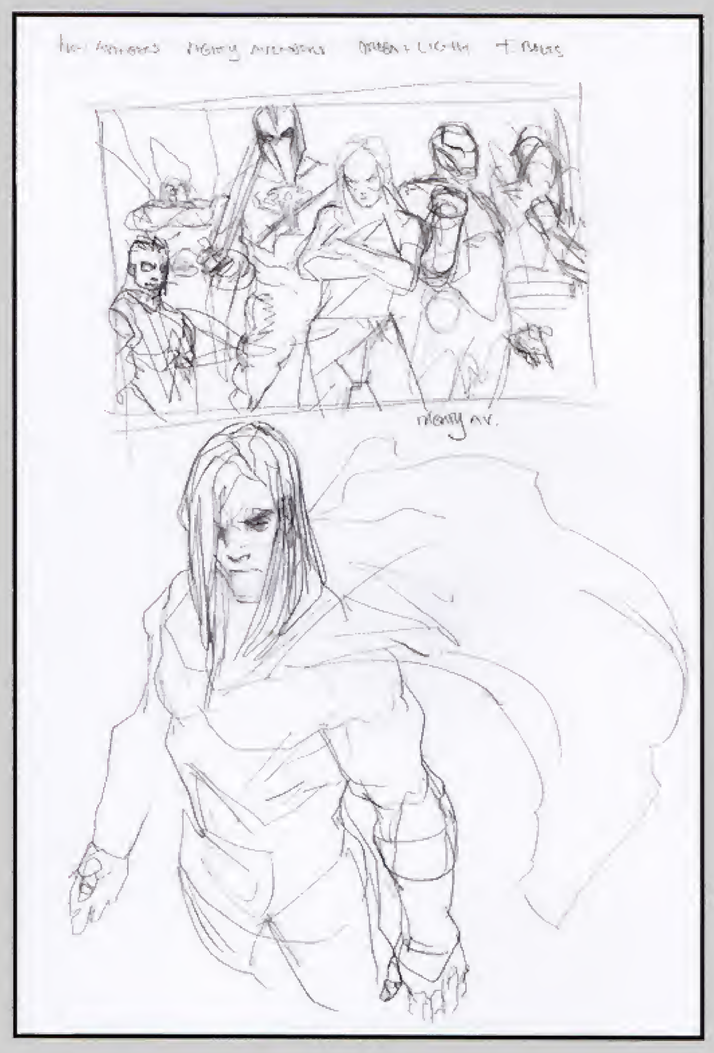
"This cover is a classic Warren Simons cover. He was the editor on this new Iron Man title, and every time he launches a book he asks me to draw the main character fighting hundreds of other characters. Ever since I delivered the *Daredevil #100* wraparound, he thinks I have the most fun with drawing ridiculous amounts of bodies on a cover!"

DEC 08 MIGHTY AVENGERS ISSUE 19 (VARIANT)

"I really love this cover for its fury and intensity. Ares: God of War, Unleashed! This piece is so visceral and raw, it's fantastic. He make the hero's flesh textures sort of like stone as if he's one of those grand Greek statues come to life. I love how Marko lit him from underneath. Ares looks like he's rising from the pits of the underworld to take on demons from another world. He's not taking any prisoners…" – **Chris Allo**

"Originally, the story in this issue was to feature Ares, but they changed it up at the last minute and they couldn't use the cover I had generated; it wouldn't have made sense to put Ares on a cover of a book he wasn't in. I had to replace it with another classic cover homage, which was disappointing because I liked the Ares cover a lot. He is a great character – one I have a lot of fun painting. I cannot get enough of Greek mythology. *The Odyssey* was a favorite book when I was growing up and I was *completely* lost in the worlds of Greek mythology. Everything about it, from the gods to the heroes to the mythical creatures, is a trove of interesting things to reflect upon and then work into my art.

"I am not so crazy about certain details in his costume, like the skull and bones design, but I cannot be redesigning every character that is out there. I definitely like the action in the picture, its energy, and the entire flow of the image really gives me a good feeling when I look at it. I consider this to be a successful painting."



"The Wasp here is very soft and very vulnerable, which was the entire concept of the image. I wanted to show her passing away, with a kind of mellow resignation to her figure. She's accepting what's happening to her, accepting that she's dying. I think you see far more frustration and trauma in the heroes that are reaching out for her than you see in her face."

"Again, I though the color combination of this group of Mighty Avengers was *so* amazing, because it allowed me to mute the colors and just let the red speak for itself. Artistically, it was a lot of fun – but then they switched the entire roster around, which really bummed me out because I would have loved to continue working with that set of characters."

"If anybody would ever let me, I think I would set up a gallery with super heroes that are all covered in shadow. I think a simple image like this is far more striking than an overly complicated one. You can take this image and blow it up to ten times the size and it would make a perfect movie poster.

"I like creating impact through close-ups, really going in there and showing all the veins and the skin textures and the facial structure, giving the viewer some details to appreciate. I think from a promotional standpoint it was very successful, because that's what they're looking for: it has to have the impact. You want the reader to stop, enjoy the image for a second, and then read the text that accompanies it."

"I had so much fun doing this cover, because I did it while I was delivering an art lecture. I had ninety students in front of me, and they asked me to explain the entire cover-building process to them. I started from scratch in the morning, and finished in the late afternoon, and I was able to present the entire process to the crowd. Everybody clapped and cheered when I completed it.

"I created two layers: the new Iron Patriot armor designed by Norman Osborn and, behind him, a shot of Osborn himself. I gave the background design a sheen that resembled an old, grainy film that clearly contrasted the shiny, bright, new super hero – the leader of the Dark Avengers who is appearing in public and showing off his armor for the first time. It just showed the thin line between those two characters: the shining knight out front and the mad mind behind it, power hungry and covered in shadows."

AUG 09 WOLVERINE ISSUE 75

"The previous Mighty Avengers line-up was very complementary. But now this new lineup includes pretty much every color from the entire spectrum, which makes it a little more difficult for me to work with."

THE AVENGERS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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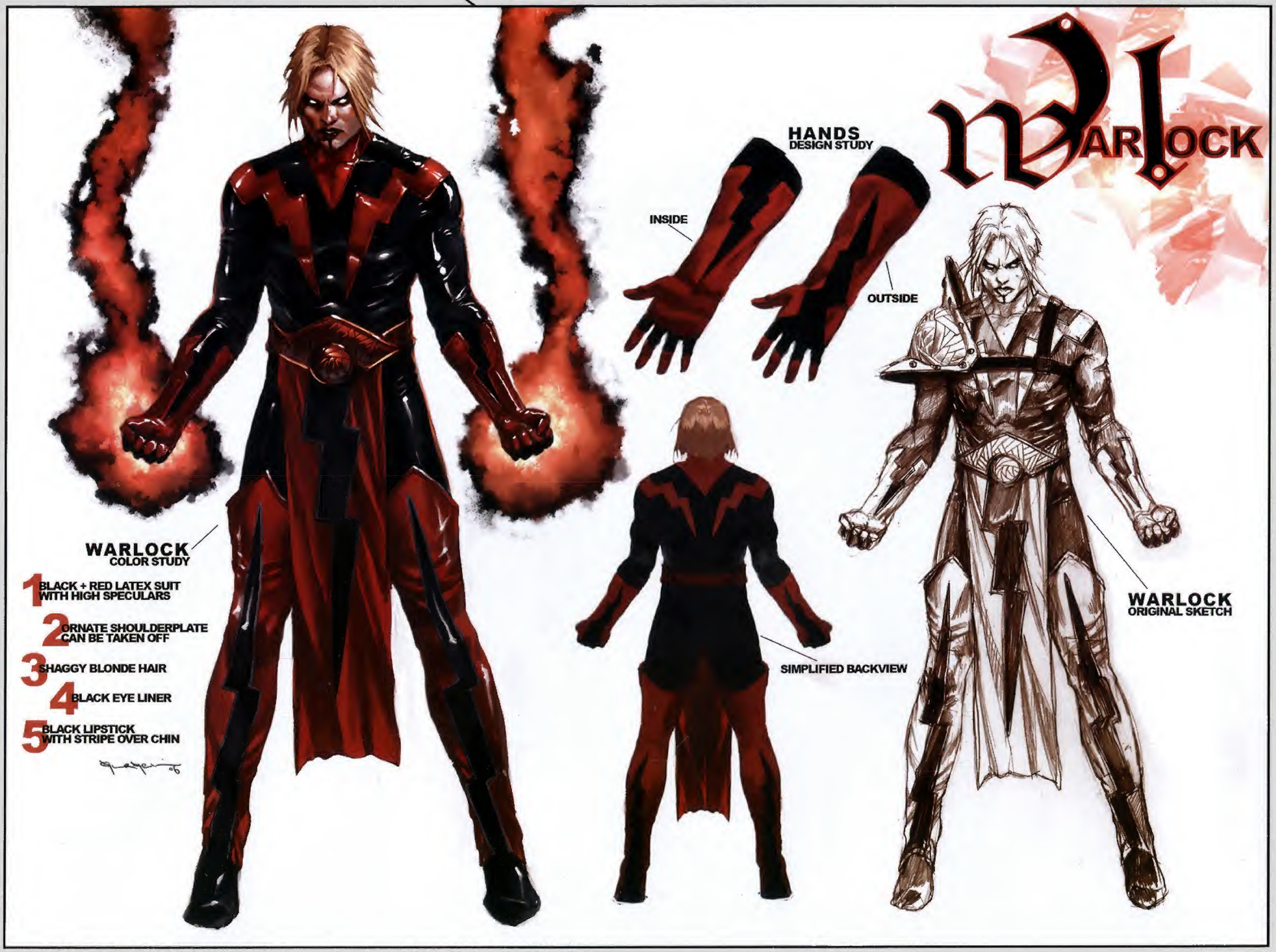
CAPTAIN AMERICA LIVES AGAIN!
ALSO IN THIS SENSATIONAL ISSUE...
SUB-MARINER



"Warlock was not a character I was familiar with before I got assigned to do the job, and the only reference I had for the character was actually visuals that I found on the internet, all of which were a little too old school for my tastes. Marvel wanted to make sure I kept the lightning bolt as part of his design, but other than that I was pretty free to work with him. The bolt became the main element I built the design around – and I just put it on everything. I put it on his hands, his boots, his long loincloth, on his chest; I really wanted to make it an intricate part of his appearance. I thought I came up with a bit more realistic costume that also set him off as free and new and modern."

STAR-LORD

1 OVERALL BRITSH APPEARANCE DUE TO TITLE LORD IN HIS NAME

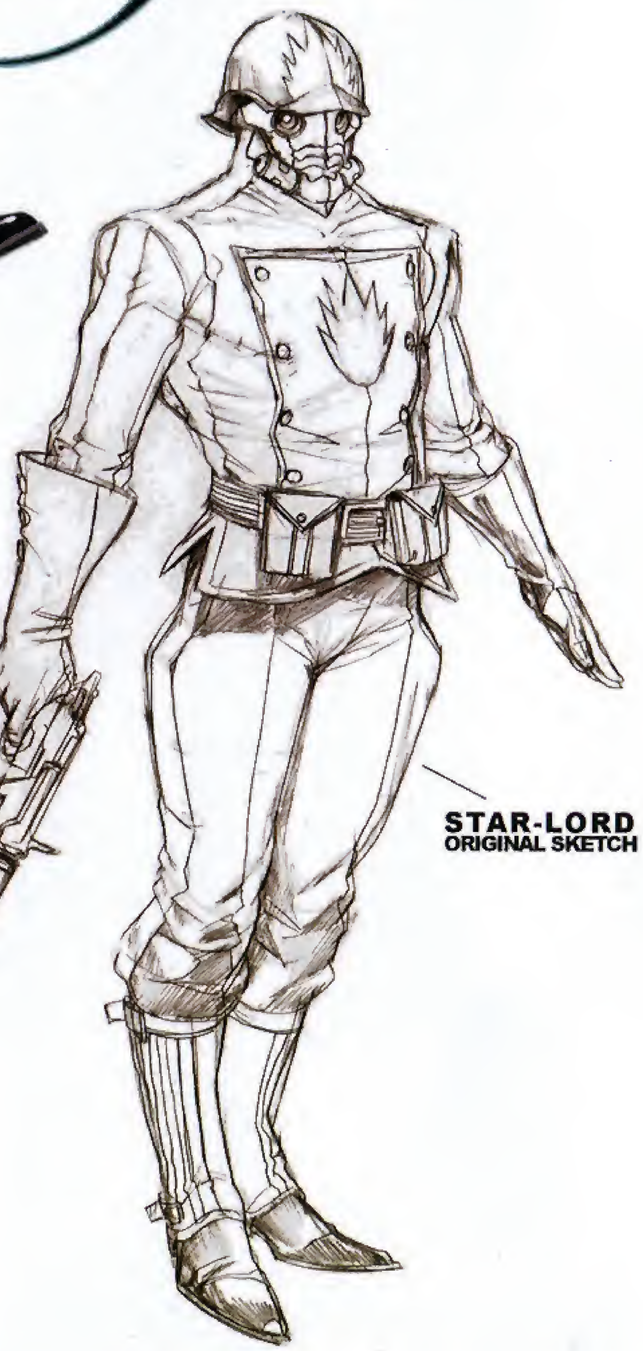
2 RETRO-FUTURISTIC LOOK WITH WW 1 ELEMENTS

3 LESS FORM FITTING COSTUME- MORE UNIFORM WITH SHARP EDGES AND STRONG SILHOUETTE

4 HELMET IN BATTLEMODE VISOR STARTS GLOWING

HEAD STUDY
FACE VISIBLE
WHEN VISOR RETRACTS

BOOTS
CHAPS GRIP
AROUND BOOTS

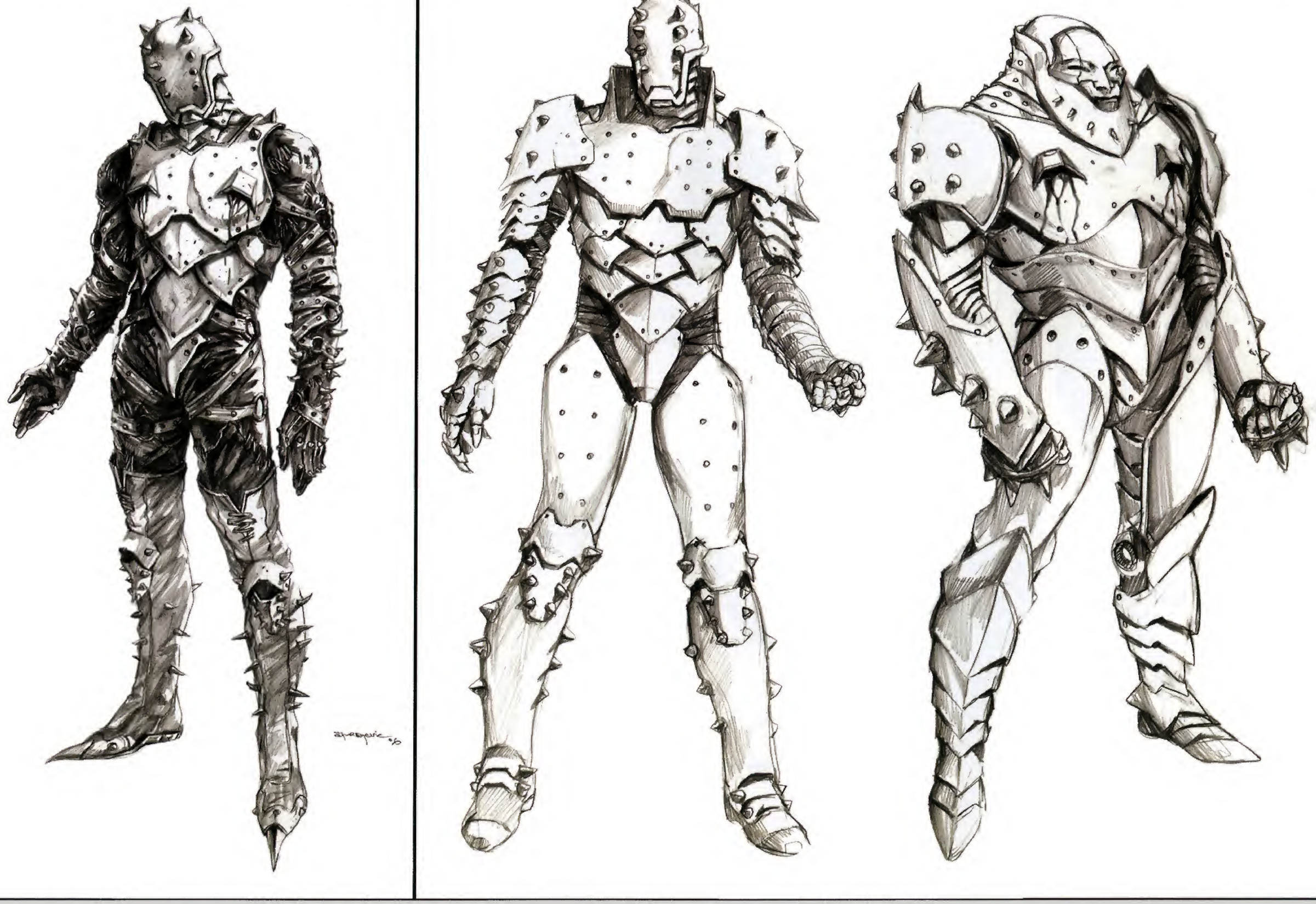


STAR-LORD
ORIGINAL SKETCH

STAR-LORD
COLOR STUDY

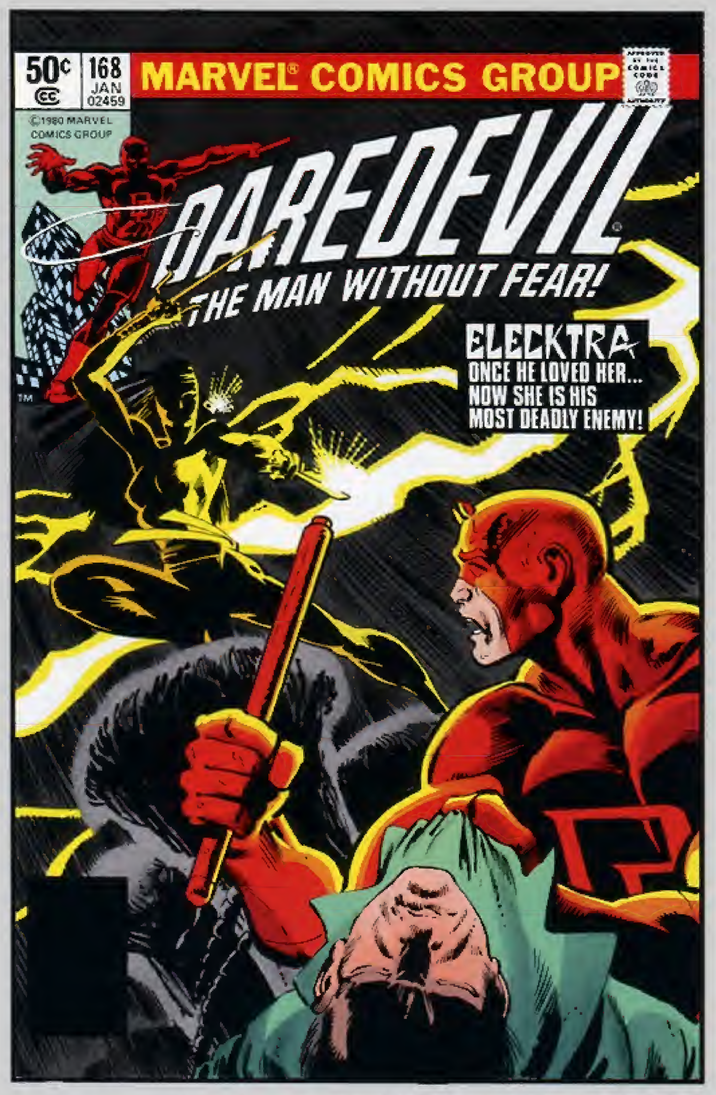
SIMPLIFIED BACKVIEW

"The main inspiration for that design came out of the name itself. I imagined him to be a sort of cosmic policeman, but I couldn't but be reminded of a British lord when I heard his name. The uniform spoke to those British qualities, especially with the riding boots he's wearing, and mask and helmet, for which I took inspiration from British military garb from the First World War. The gas mask, with the retractable visor, is the only thing ultra-modern about his outfit – all the rest seems to be of antiquity."



"'Speedball in an Iron Maiden suit' was pretty much the only information I had. I underlined the torture aspects with bolts and spikes coming out of the costume. I designed for him a sewn-together leather suit with an armored chest piece that had spikes protruding out – and possibly inside as well. I placed two bleeding holes on his chest, to showcase the point where the armor is just beginning to pierce his skin.

"I also thought it important to hide his face. I didn't have any idea of how he was actually sensing the environment around him, but at that point, I wasn't even paying attention to that, because somebody wearing a torture costume is not somebody who necessarily needs to see. I was avoiding the logic behind this – I just wanted to come up with a design that was creepy, one that portended to the viewer the agony Penance is going through without being so literal. If I would have left an opening for a face, it might have taken away from the mystery of who was actually behind the costume and where his power comes from."



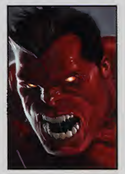
Original cover art to *Daredevil #168* by Frank Miller.

Original cover art to *Avengers #89* by Sal Buscema.

Original cover art to *Strange Tales #135* by Jack Kirby.

Original cover art to *Tales to Astonish* #27 by Jack Kirby.

CHAPTER 11
HULK



In 2009, the Hulk is not a character Marko is known for drawing. Assembled in this chapter are the small handful of covers in which he's been able to delineate the massive form of Marvel's most misunderstood monster, a hodgepodge of one-shots, variants and magazine covers. Despite the small body of work, it is some of the artist's most heartfelt work. Finding a deep connection with this iconic character was the easy part for Marko; all he had to do was crack open his first Hulk comic when he was a kid to feel an abiding empathy for the pathos inside the monster. To this day, it's a dimension of the Hulk the artist uses to channel his drawings, a dimension easily missed by all those who stick with their notions of the Hulk who merely plays the bumbling, dumb, idiot savant of overwhelming violence. Maybe one day Marko will get his shot at a regular Hulk run. Until then, the Hulk isn't a character Marko is known for drawing. Yet…

MARKO "The Hulk is a creature of raw power. So when I draw the Hulk, the question is raised to me about how I portray that raw power. But I ask the question a different way: What is that raw power good for? It has never given the Hulk peace. The power that I show in Hulk's figure is just an estimation of that raw power being worth absolutely nothing. Power alone is not a means to an end. It's not going to make the world a better place, but it makes it a lot more sad for those who have to live with it."

"I thrilled at reading the Hulk when I was a child, so totally connecting to his character. It's such a beautiful paradox when you think about how he is so strong – the strongest there is, so strong you cannot stop him – while at the same time he is unable to find a friend. The lesson underpinning his character seemed to be that no matter how mighty you are, it doesn't automatically make for a better life. The Hulk is such an unbelievably tortured character: he's never given his rest, he's always on the run, he's constantly traveling the world. He searches forever always trying to find a place of peace for himself, always trying to find a cure for his condition."

"When you compare Iron Man to Hulk, for example – Tony Stark has got his tower, his billions in the bank, and all the hot chicks. Or if you look at Captain America, he is one who is loved and respected by everyone. They have their own flaws, but largely what they represent is what is most desired by others in real life – they have a respite from what makes them flawed. They are not perfectly flawed like the Hulk, who has always represented the greatness of a hero far better than other characters: the imperfect god that is constantly striving for his own betterment. This is the essence of the character that always kept me engaged with him. I would draw and paint the Hulk all day long."

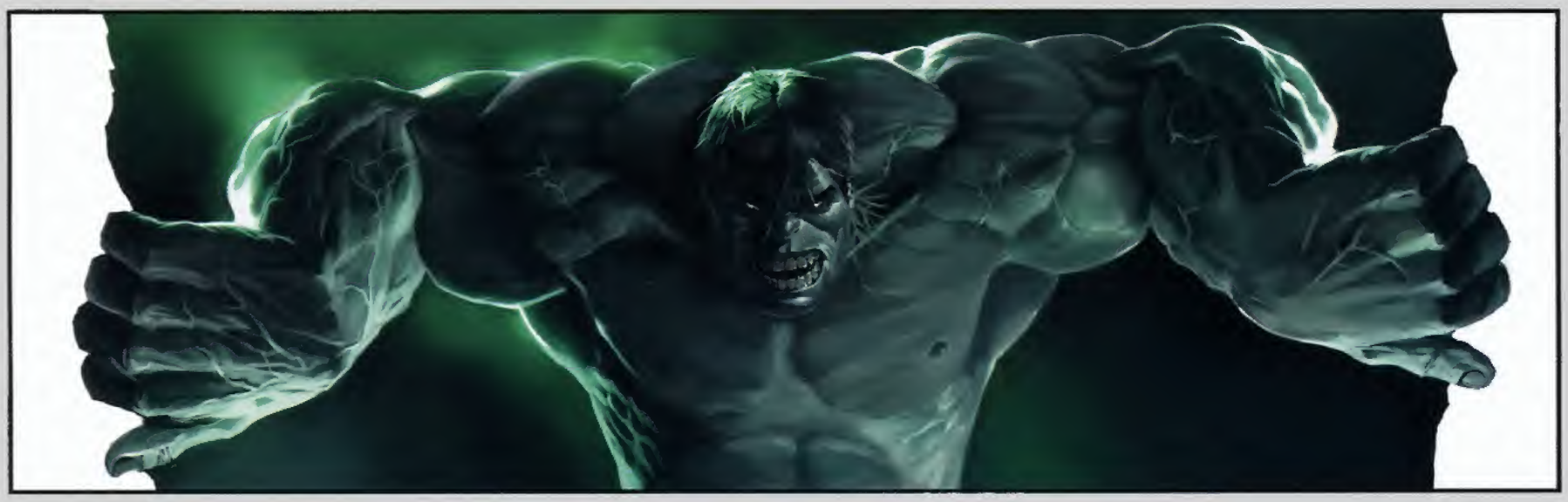
APR 08 **HULK**
ISSUE 2 (VARIANT)

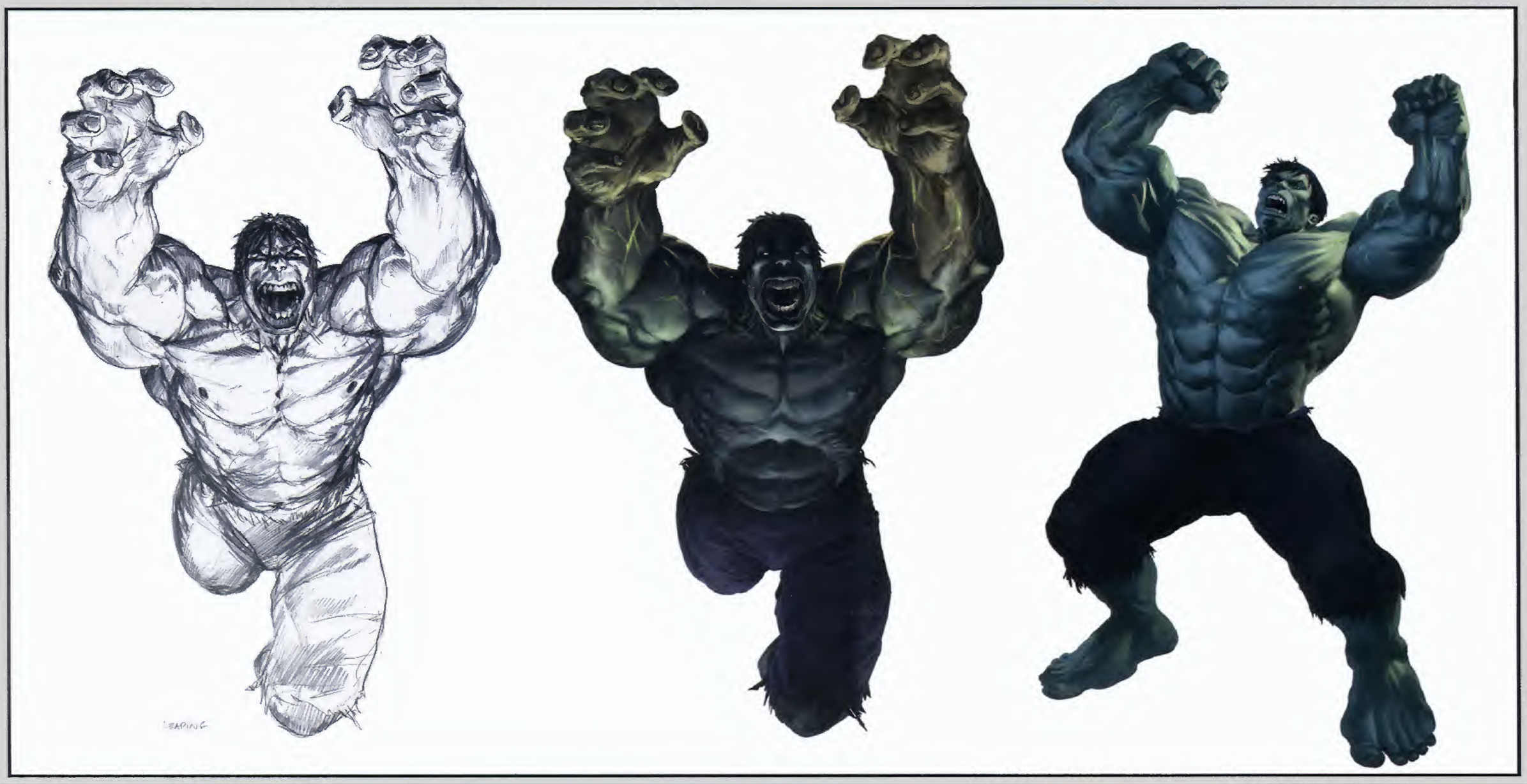
"It's a pleasure painting him as realistically as possible. If you look at my version of the Hulk, it's a little different from a lot of other artists who are either trying to make him more primitive – sometimes a lot more primitive – or a lot more exaggerated. Even when having to contend with depicting his massive size, I work to give him some sort of realism – depicting him as a huge human being on steroids, perhaps, or giving his face a wide variety of expressions."

"His larger-than-life nature always works best when you put him into context with something else. For example, on the Wizard cover I painted him holding up a black flag with all the fallen heroes around him. Or the cover where he's going up against Hercules, it gives you a chance to take in all that sheer mass and realize there's nobody bigger than him."

"The character definitely translates so many essential human conditions on so many different levels; it's one of the few characters where I could easily see him venture into literature. He has all the aspects of Frankenstein buried inside, he's got the Jekyll and Hyde complex going on, his story narrative includes the classical Buddhist search for a place of peace and meaning. Those buttons aren't pushed in comics enough.

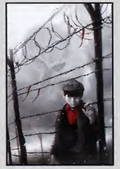
"But it goes even further – it goes into the back story of Bruce Banner having been witness to his father murdering his mother and having to bury that trauma deep inside. With that in mind, the Hulk is merely a manifestation of the rage that he felt when he was a child, and the gamma radiation wasthe trigger that releases the rage. I really think that it's one of the deepest franchises Marvel has."

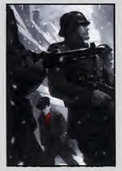




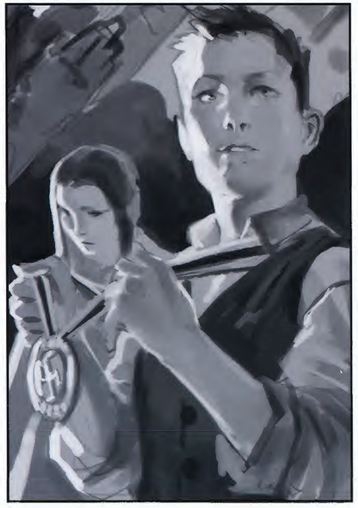
"These are my concept designs for the *Incredible Hulk* film, my complete vision before the process took over and changed them."

CHAPTER 12
MAGNETO



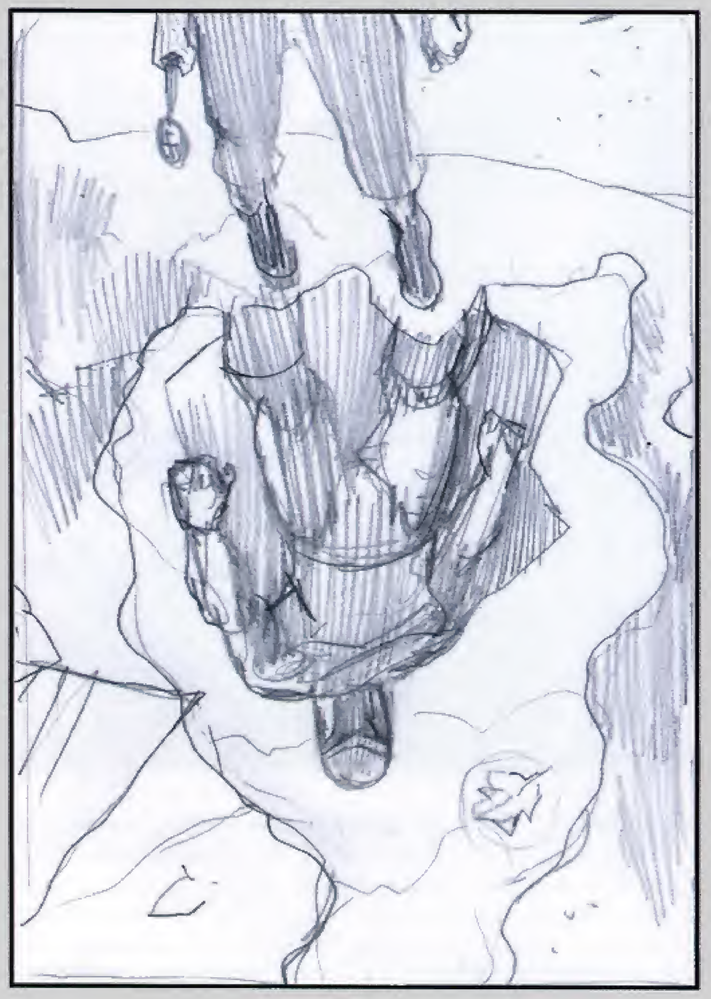


There's nothing simple about Magneto. In the decades since his first appearance in X-Men #1, *he has emerged as one of the Marvel Universe's most complex characters. First cast by Stan Lee as the cackling, evil overlord of Homo superior rising, his persona evolved under the stewardship of writer Chris Claremont into a more multidimensional portrayal. The first glimpse inside this character's depth was courtesy of a newly introduced origin: Born a Jew in Germany during Hitler's rise to power, Magneto's early life was filled with the creeping carnage of the Nazi takeover of Europe – with the mind-bending cruelty of the Holocaust lying just around the corner. For a character whose raison d'etre had always been as no-nonsense protector of his persecuted minority of mutants, these nuances led to many probing new stories about Marvel's elite bad guy. Drawing the covers to Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's* X-Men: Magneto – Testament *limited series gave Marko a chance to explore those nuances. To place the travails of the young Auschwitz prisoner into context, Marko relied on a restricted color palette and total reverence for the epic story, and in the process, gave testament to what were the daily, harrowing trials of a young boy just trying to stay alive.*



MARKO "It is artistically liberating to be able to do covers that have only subtle connections to super heroes. In addition to that, I'm a huge sucker for learning about history, particularly about the First and Second World Wars. The amount of world-changing events that happened during these two wars is very inspiring to me from an artistic standpoint – the Second World War especially has been the most gruesome war ever led in human history. Never has the destruction of human life been perfected in a more perverted way than how the Nazis acted out genocide against the Jews. This was a great opportunity to be able to tackle something that is grounded in the real world in which we actually live. For me, this was very much a personal story, one where I really had the feeling that I was doing something with a lasting value to it."

NOV 08 **X-MEN: MAGNETO – TESTAMENT**
ISSUE 1



"To be assigned a more mature series such as *Magneto – Testament* was very satisfying; it's so much more centered around the history of the world that I'm living in. I grew up in Germany, grew up with German history, and I get to experience living in this nation every day, so for me it's very easy to become absorbed in the process of drawing covers for a Jewish boy growing up in Nazi Germany."

"And I use the term 'mature' because no matter what you do with super hero comics, the illustrations will never translate reality in a fully developed way. No matter how nicely you paint your Thor covers, it's always going to be an out-of-this-world, brawny dude that wears chainmail and a huge cape."

JAN 09 **X-MEN: MAGNETO – TESTAMENT**
ISSUE 3

"The color concepts themselves were pretty simple; it's merely the Nazi color scheme that was ubiquitous under Hitler – white, grey, red, and black. Those colors were used by the Nazis for all their propaganda posters, for their flags, for their banners, for everything. If you illustrate a story featuring Nazis, you want to give it the feel of the times, and colors can do so much for you in that regard. If you reduce your colors to a certain palette, you can tell the story a lot easier than if you were trying to labor a more diverse amount of colors into it. Doing that from the start insured I'd keep the right tonality for the series. All the covers were built on the same idea, to use splashes of red to enhance the drama inherent in the story."

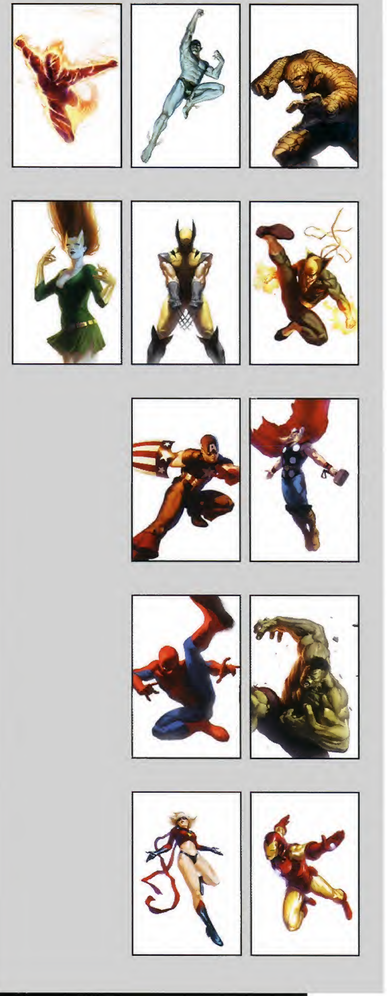
"The swastika is illegal to be reproduced in Germany, so I try to avoid that as much as possible. There are no swastikas on these covers. But as established, the color textures used make the pointed symbolism of the swastika largely irrelevant."

MAR 09 X-MEN: MAGNETO – TESTAMENT ISSUE 5

"This is a very stark image, very strong. It's just a close-up of Magneto's face as a child, with a shaven head, and there's fire reflected in his eyes. He is witnessing the burning of bodies in the camp furnaces. Its power comes from a combination of this expression and the intimacy with the viewer. Using proximity to this extent, you can bring out more emotion than if you removed the character to the background and visually referenced what he was looking at. You don't have to show everything literally: Sometimes hiding the information – like the fire in his eyes that represents his parents and all of his friends being burned to cinders – tells the story more effectively because it inspires questions. What is that reflecting in his eyes? Why is he crying? It engages your audience to take part in finding the answers."

"We talked back and forth for a bit about the cover idea for the last issue and then he went off to start work on the sketch. Normally the way the cover process works is, he'll send in a sketch, I'll run the sketch around and bounce it off a couple of people and see what they think. But this time, he did the complete painting over the weekend. He turned it in, saying, 'Listen, this was so beautiful I just had to finish it.' It's just a very simple shot of Magneto; it's just a gorgeous cover – a simple headshot but there's so much energy and compassion and heart put into that particular shot." – **Warren Simons**

CHAPTER 13
MARVEL 70TH ANNIVERSARY VARIANTS



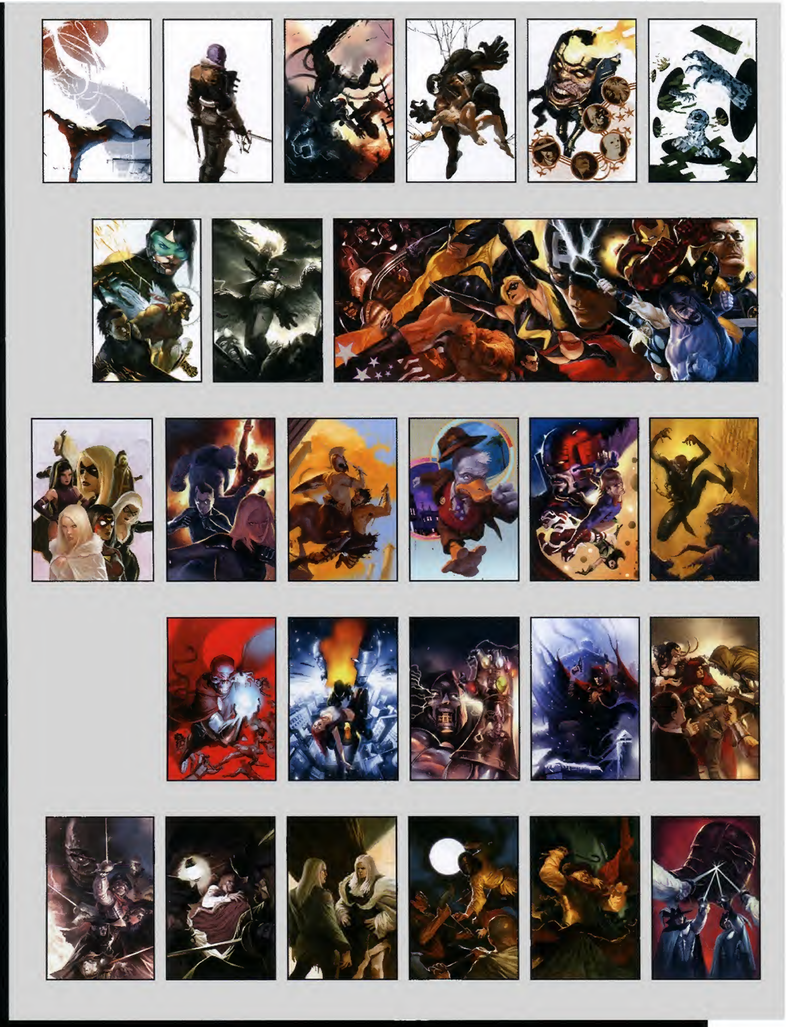
In September 2009, Marvel will turn the calendar on a full 70 years of history. Debuting to none of the fanfare with which it is feted now, Marvel Comics #1 *introduced in its pages a random collection of adventure, Western and super heroes. There were similar books on the shelves around it, but what those books didn't have was two dramatically different characters like Human Torch and Sub-Mariner, nor did they have as explosive a cover. Sales boomed for this Timely book and a pop culture legacy was born. Since then, there's been a seven decade record of Marvel employing some of the greatest art talent in comics history to tell stories with its deep catalogue of trend-setting characters.*

Part of the reason this art book is in your hands is that artists like Marko Djurdjevic are ably taking up the reins of the old guard, not by aping the successes of the past, but by pushing the boundaries of the artform and finding new ways to express the Marvel Universe of characters. That alone is nothing new: It is the way Marvel, at its best, has always done it. In keeping with that idea, a series of variant covers was commissioned to adorn a different Marvel title each month in 2009, in which Marko gave his own modern rendition of classic Marvel characters. As you will see, his approach to characters like Spider-Man, Sub-Mariner, and Captain America is as unique and stylish as any of the masters. If the next 70 years starts out like this, Marvel is in good hands…

MARKO "I did these variant covers for Chris Allo. He's my earliest contact and also my closest friend over at Marvel. He's a wonderful person who is really excited about my work, and I've spent so many hours on the phone with him throughout the past three years. You can definitely feel it every time he talks about something that I did that he is really into it. When he approached me for this job, I knew it would be a really easy gig for me – all he wanted was just a simple version of each of the Marvel characters on a white background with a little touch of Marko in it.

"Everything else was my cup of tea to finish. He gave me a list of the twelve characters and away I went; it's actually the fastest gig I've ever done. I painted all twelve characters in only ten days, so it's been a fantastic cover gig for me to do. I sat down and did all the sketches in one day while I was still in my first inspiration for the job, and then I just painted them one by one. I had such a feeling of completion after they were done, that I turned them all in as a group instead of sending them out in batches. I just wanted to see what impact it would make if Chris were to see them all at once. He was blown away and, of course, really happy about the turnaround."

CHAPTER 14
VARIOUS ARTISTRY

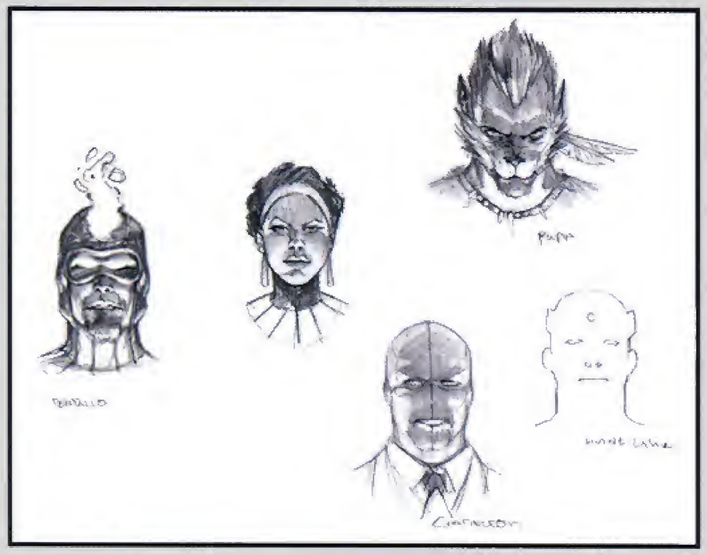


The final covers in this art book cover random series, specials, or one-shots that don't fit easily into standard character or title themes. It includes a handful of dynamic covers for What If? *– Marvel's title of alternate ending tales – including an astounding gatefold for the Civil War issue; Marko's irreverent take on Steve Gerber's already more-than-irreverent Howard the Duck; a gallery of illustrations for Roy Thomas' adaptation of Alexandre Dumas classic* The Man In The Iron Mask*; rare cover art for a French comic book magazine; some rarely seen test paintings; and more interesting artifacts from his covers career – particularly a piece of Sub-Mariner art that has to be seen to be believed.*

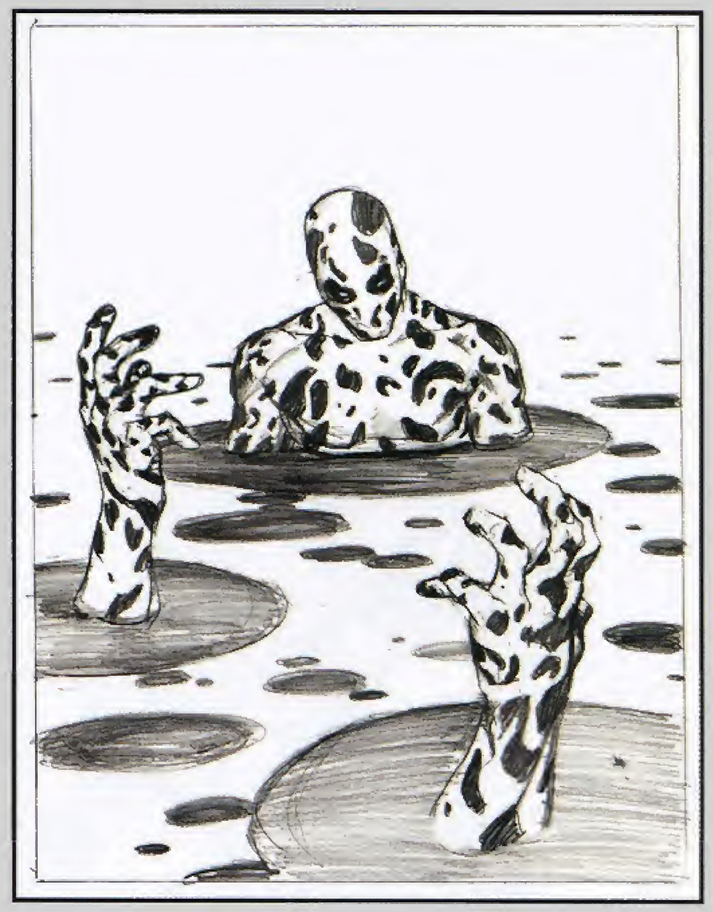
But that's the trick with Marko: In many ways, seeing is believing. For someone who toils in an industry that tells fantastic stories, his lust for portraying realism through painting has brought the Marvel cast of characters to vivid life in exciting new ways. Many would say that in order to tell stories featuring super-powered beings with extra-human abilities, an artist would need to be a master at creating "the suspension of disbelief." Marko takes a different route. He finds something in his subject matter to believe in. It's called art. And Marvel has been honored to have it as a standard-bearer of their fiction for three years…and for many more to come.

MARKO "I expose myself on a daily basis to the best artists in the industry. My learning process is connected to these artists. You never want to be satisfied with anything you do – always look out for the best and be challenged by them. You don't necessarily need to know and work with them on a daily basis but if you surround yourself with their artwork you it will become a real influence in making you want to be better. It's an ego thing: Use it to push yourself further and further."

OCT 07 SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP: MODOK'S 11 ISSUE 2

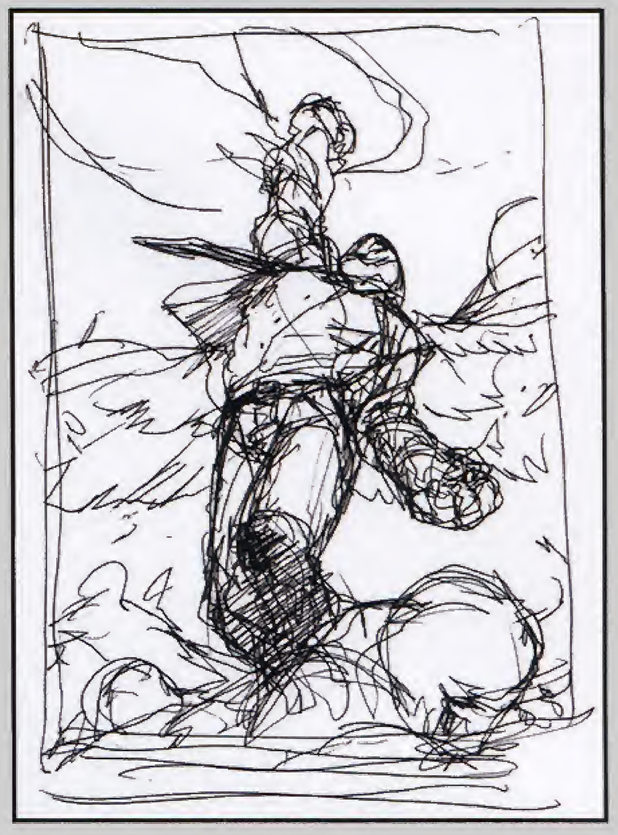


"It was around the time I was working on Blade that I got assigned to do the *Super-Villain Team-Up* covers. These were fun, irreverent stories. MODOK itself – or *him*self, however he is to be addressed – is such a goofy character. There's no way for me as illustrator to take him seriously. The rest of the cast of characters were, taken altogether, composed to exploit the humor in the comic, so I just simply went for funny themes for the cover art and gave them a light-hearted touch."



DEC 07

SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP: MODOK'S 11 ISSUE 4



"At the time *Civil War* came out, I had just begun reading comics again after being away for ten or so years. The packaging of the series was startling to me, it was such a beautiful, beautiful design. I loved the fact there was so much white space on each of the covers, the logo was in such a prominent place, and the cover art was presented in the form of a banner across the bottom. Just from an aesthetic standpoint, these were some extremely creative choices.

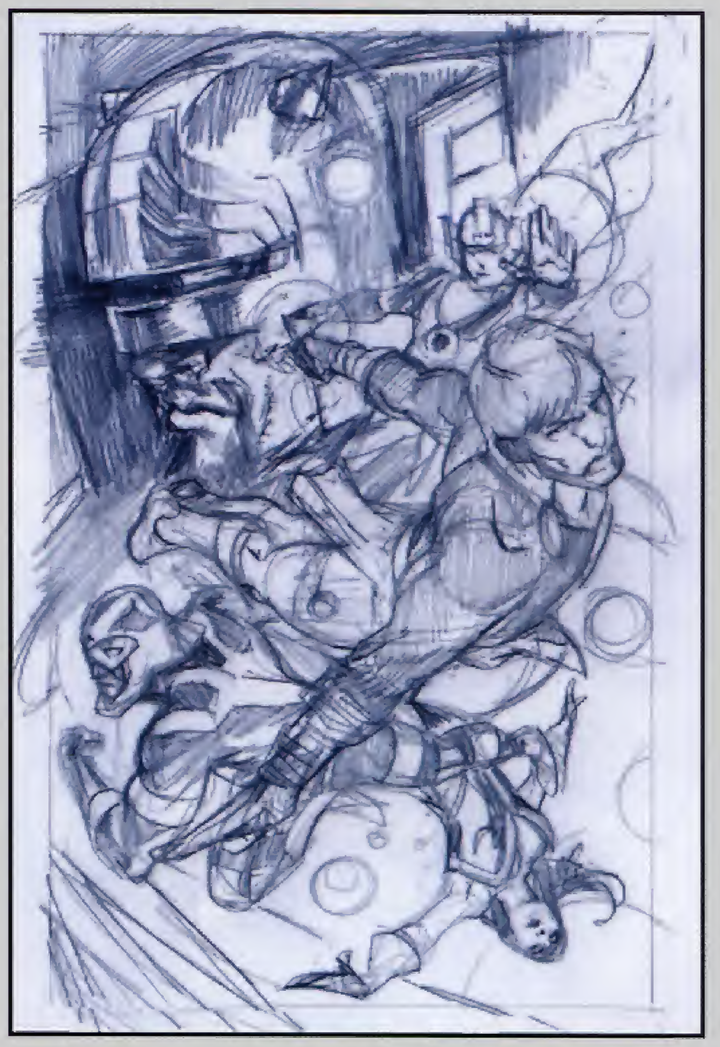
"When *What If: Civil War* came around, I was really happy because I could finally take part in employing that spread-out panorama for a composition. (*Civil War* artist) Steve McNiven had already done so many nice character montages in the main series, so I decided to do something that was basically channeling that aspect of *Civil War*, pulling in all the major players from the original series and placing them all so you could clearly read the piece from left to right."

WHAT IF: CIVIL WAR FEB 09

JUL 08

HOWARD THE DUCK OMNIBUS HARDCOVER

"I never have the chance to draw cartoons except in my free time, and I actually do quite a lot of them just for my own pleasure. So when I got this assignment, it was a great opportunity to let loose and do an image that has absolutely no maturity to it at all. I wanted to go crazy on the design, so I put the Miami Vice-style background in there with those *super garish* colors on top: the purples, the blues, the turquoise. The whole combination really takes it over-the-top."



"The most memorable thing about this cover to me is that it was what I was working on the week my son was born. I was very sleep deprived."

DEC 08

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ISSUE 573 (ZOMBIE VARIANT)

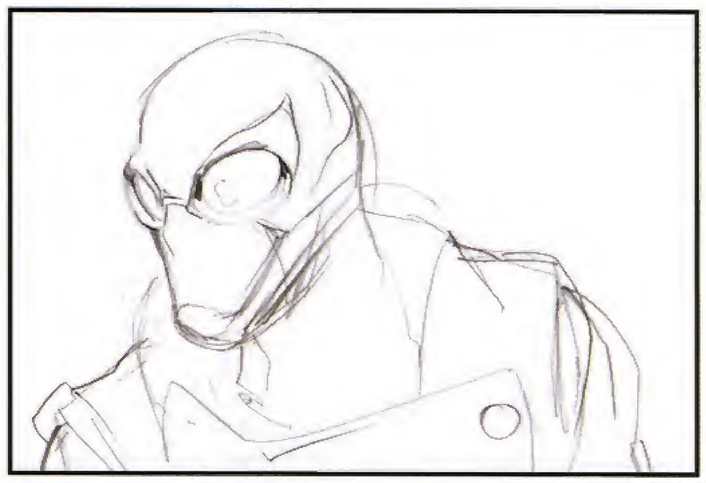
JAN 08 **MAN IN THE IRON MASK**
ISSUE 5

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Every page of this book has been devoted to the myriad of covers Marko has produced for Marvel over the last three years. But that is not all he's done. Behind the scenes, he has employed his formidable talents as a concept artist to design several characters for a handful of contemporary Marvel titles. Though he's still adding to his resume as a modern master of the comic book cover (not to mention his initial steps into the terrain of interior comic art), it's his design work that has gotten him to where he is today. And he's good. Damned good.

A case in point: His concept work for Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning's space opera Annihilation *produced a quartet of character designs that were cosmic in scope. Three redesigns of '70s era favorites (Quasar, Star-Lord and Warlock) and one design totally of Marko's making (Wraith) added to the ultra-contemporary feel of the space-faring mini-series. To show his versatility, Marko also recently designed the costume for Spider-Man Noir, a version of Peter Parker set in the 1930s. Further, we cap off this book with a look at a series of X-Men sketches done while Marko was still at Massive Black and any thought of a career at Marvel was pure fancy.*

But to actually see Marko in action, his Massive Black instructional DVD Marko Djurdjevic: Character Ideation *showcases him in the process of designing his own original characters right before your eyes. His insights into the process will augment the understanding of his art that you may have gleaned from this book. Until then, check out the designs on the following pages and enjoy what Marko's partner-in-crime, Jason Manley, described in his foreword as Marko's "virtuoso imagination." Here, then, is the act of creation.*



MARKO "During my days at Massive Black, I must have created thousands of characters that are now rotting away in the drawers of some big companies. They're never going to see the light of day, I'm not allowed to publish them anywhere, and nobody's ever going to know that I did them. It's part of my life that I used to do stuff like that.

"With Marvel, my role in designing a character was actually promoted. It would be mentioned on the Marvel website, or by the editors or writers in interviews. It's nice to get public praise for your creative efforts.

"My approach with design is pretty much always the same. Having just turned 30, I still feel young, and my tastes and cultural references might be completely different than a 30-year-old artist twenty years ago. If such an artist is assigned to draw a concept for a character today, he might not be inspired by the same things that I am inspired by. You see that happening quite a bit, where old school artists are designing modern characters and those modern characters end up looking old school again. That is fine, but personally I want to avoid that with my work. I try to go as much with the pop culture trends as I feel comfortable with, while at the same time push for my own vision."

QUASAR

1 RED LATEX SUIT WITH GOLD APPLICATIONS

2 IN POWER MODE, SHE FORMS ARMOR PLATES OUT OF LIGHT

3 STAR SYMBOL STARTS GLOWING IN POWER MODE

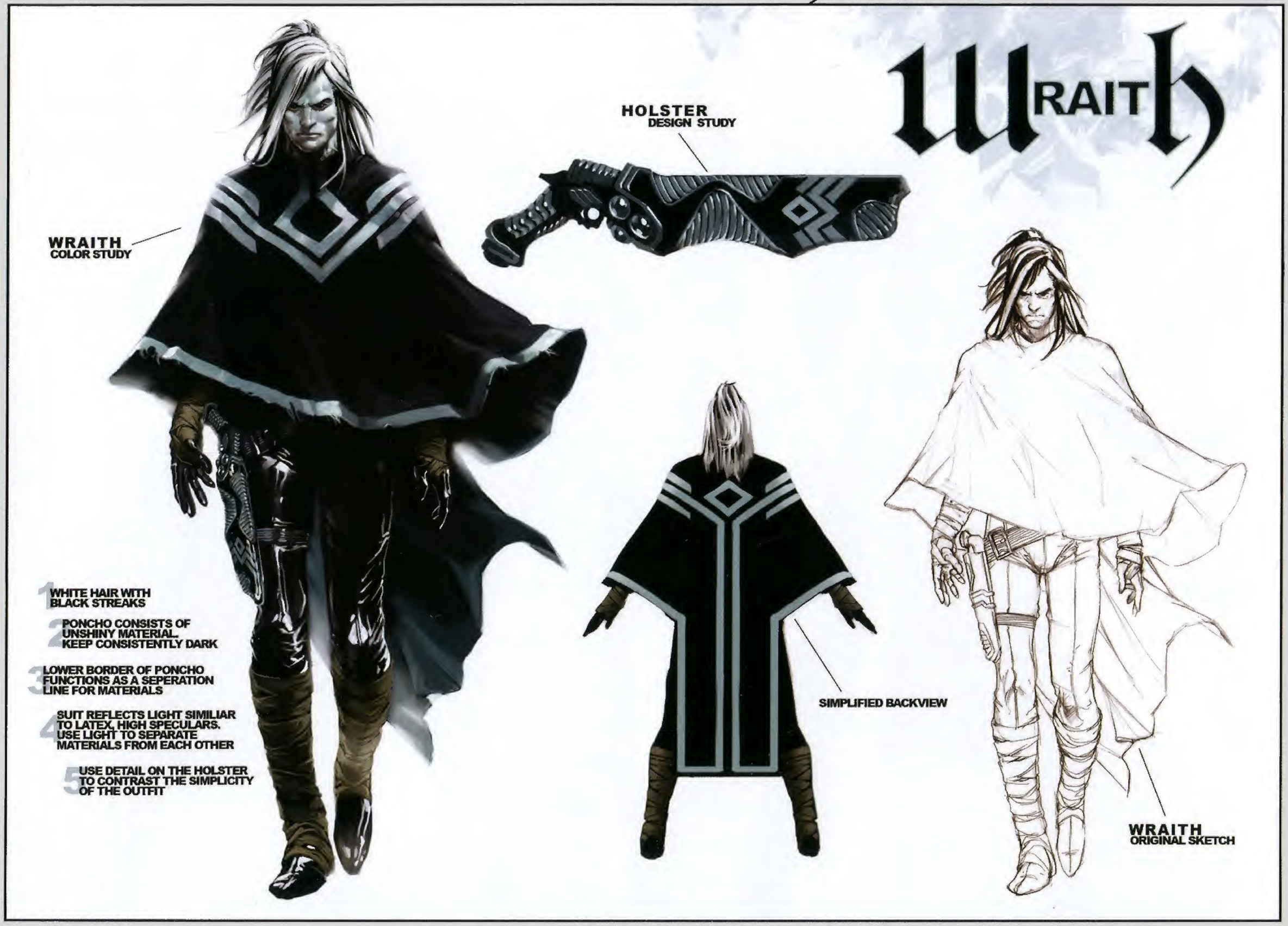
QUASAR
COLOR STUDY

SIMPLIFIED BACKVIEW

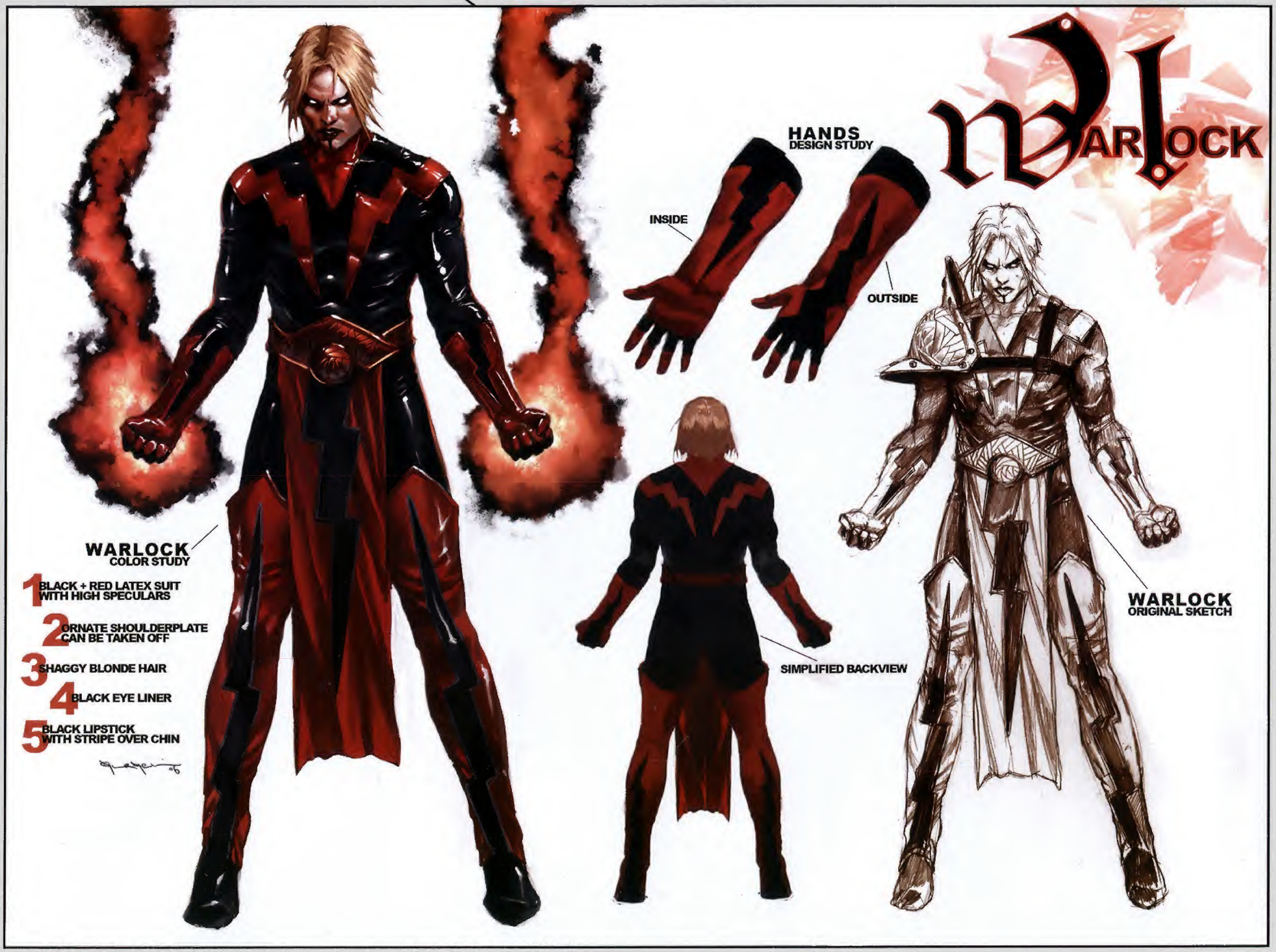
QUASAR
POWERED UP

QUASAR
ORIGINAL SKETCH

"Marvel's cosmic cast is so full of unexplored territory, and I think what they have been doing with them lately has been so interesting. *Annihilation* was incredible, not the least because of Gabriele Dell'Otto's fantastic covers, and it really pushed boundaries that Marvel should continue to push. One of the entertaining aspects of designing the cosmic characters is they seem to have a sense of pioneer spirit. They are unleashed upon the vastness of space to make their own way, and their potential for innovative character designs should reflect that."



"The description given to me for Wraith was 'Clint Eastwood in space,' and I took it from there, wanting to capture that idea of a lone gunman in space. I gave him a poncho, which is something that you wouldn't expect from a guy traveling in outer space, but I still think it's such a unique piece of clothing; it's not the classical super hero cape, but it implies a lot of the same effects. The poncho was emblazoned with Indian-style carvings to give him some iconography in a more naturalistic way than just planting a logo on his chest. I wanted viewers to take away a sense of mystery from the Wraith, to imagine that he can somehow move about unseen by others."



"Warlock was not a character I was familiar with before I got assigned to do the job, and the only reference I had for the character was actually visuals that I found on the internet, all of which were a little too old school for my tastes. Marvel wanted to make sure I kept the lightning bolt as part of his design, but other than that I was pretty free to work with him. The bolt became the main element I built the design around – and I just put it on everything. I put it on his hands, his boots, his long loincloth, on his chest; I really wanted to make it an intricate part of his appearance. I thought I came up with a bit more realistic costume that also set him off as free and new and modern."

STAR-LORD

1 OVERALL BRITSH APPEARANCE DUE TO TITLE LORD IN HIS NAME

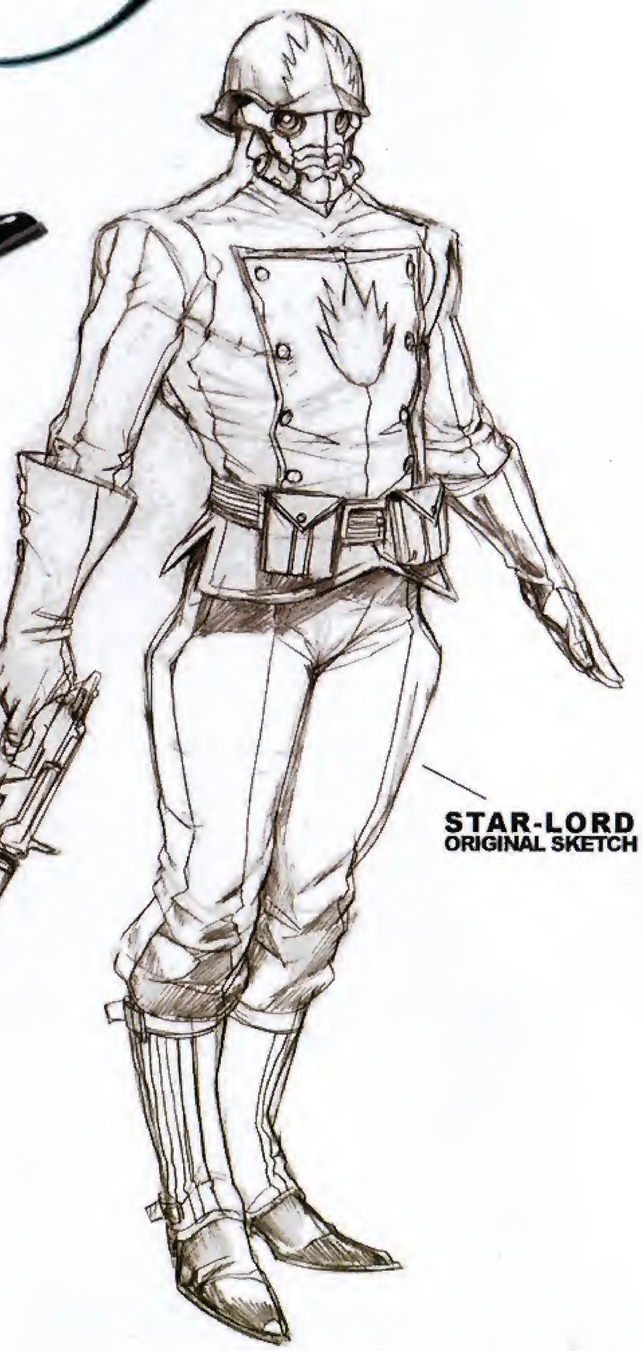
2 RETRO-FUTURISTIC LOOK WITH WW 1 ELEMENTS

3 LESS FORM FITTING COSTUME- MORE UNIFORM WITH SHARP EDGES AND STRONG SILHOUETTE

4 HELMET IN BATTLEMODE VISOR STARTS GLOWING

HEAD STUDY
FACE VISIBLE
WHEN VISOR RETRACTS

BOOTS
CHAPS GRIP
AROUND BOOTS

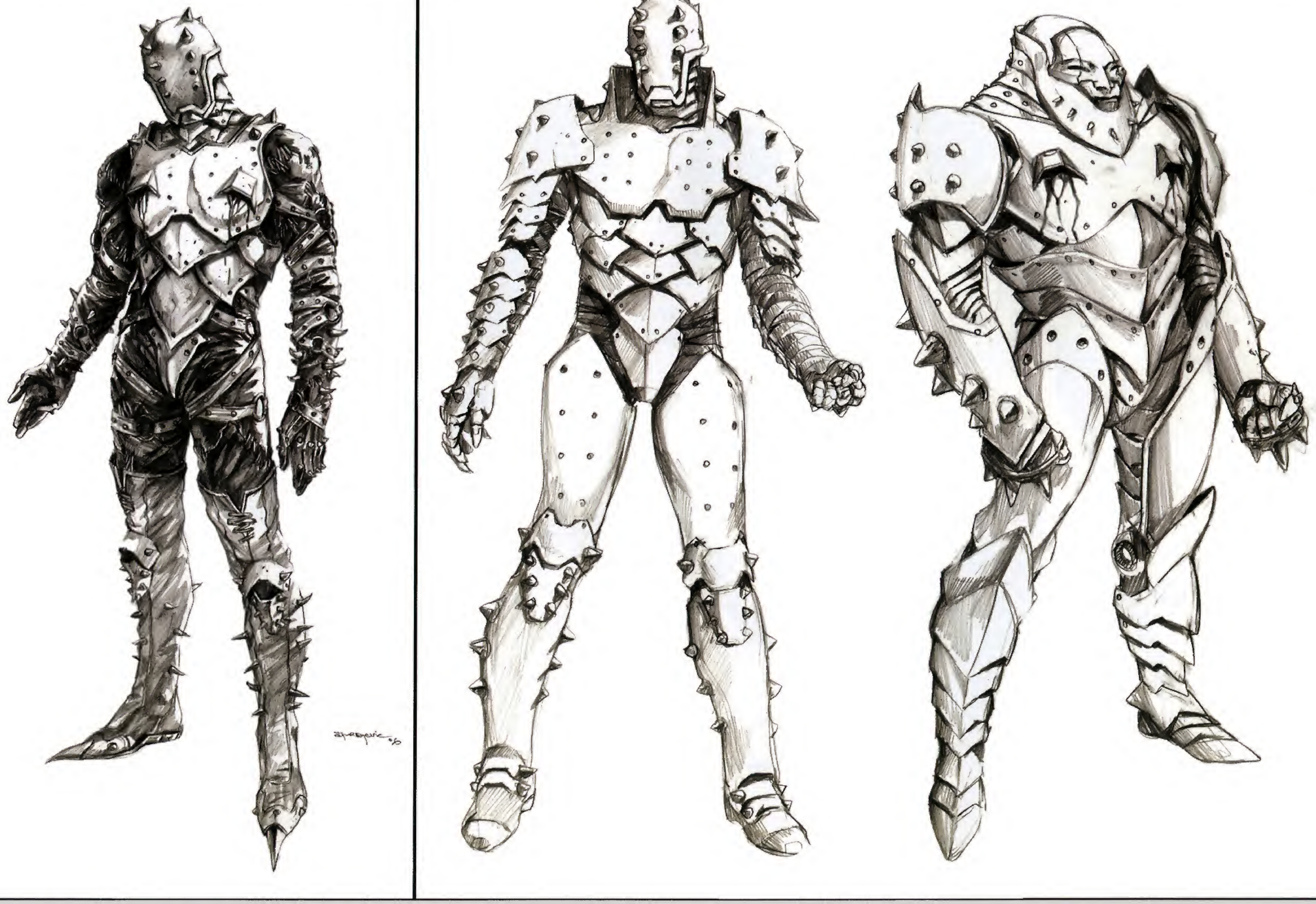


STAR-LORD
ORIGINAL SKETCH

STAR-LORD
COLOR STUDY

SIMPLIFIED BACKVIEW

"The main inspiration for that design came out of the name itself. I imagined him to be a sort of cosmic policeman, but I couldn't but be reminded of a British lord when I heard his name. The uniform spoke to those British qualities, especially with the riding boots he's wearing, and mask and helmet, for which I took inspiration from British military garb from the First World War. The gas mask, with the retractable visor, is the only thing ultra-modern about his outfit – all the rest seems to be of antiquity."



"'Speedball in an Iron Maiden suit' was pretty much the only information I had. I underlined the torture aspects with bolts and spikes coming out of the costume. I designed for him a sewn-together leather suit with an armored chest piece that had spikes protruding out – and possibly inside as well. I placed two bleeding holes on his chest, to showcase the point where the armor is just beginning to pierce his skin.

"I also thought it important to hide his face. I didn't have any idea of how he was actually sensing the environment around him, but at that point, I wasn't even paying attention to that, because somebody wearing a torture costume is not somebody who necessarily needs to see. I was avoiding the logic behind this – I just wanted to come up with a design that was creepy, one that portended to the viewer the agony Penance is going through without being so literal. If I would have left an opening for a face, it might have taken away from the mystery of who was actually behind the costume and where his power comes from."

1

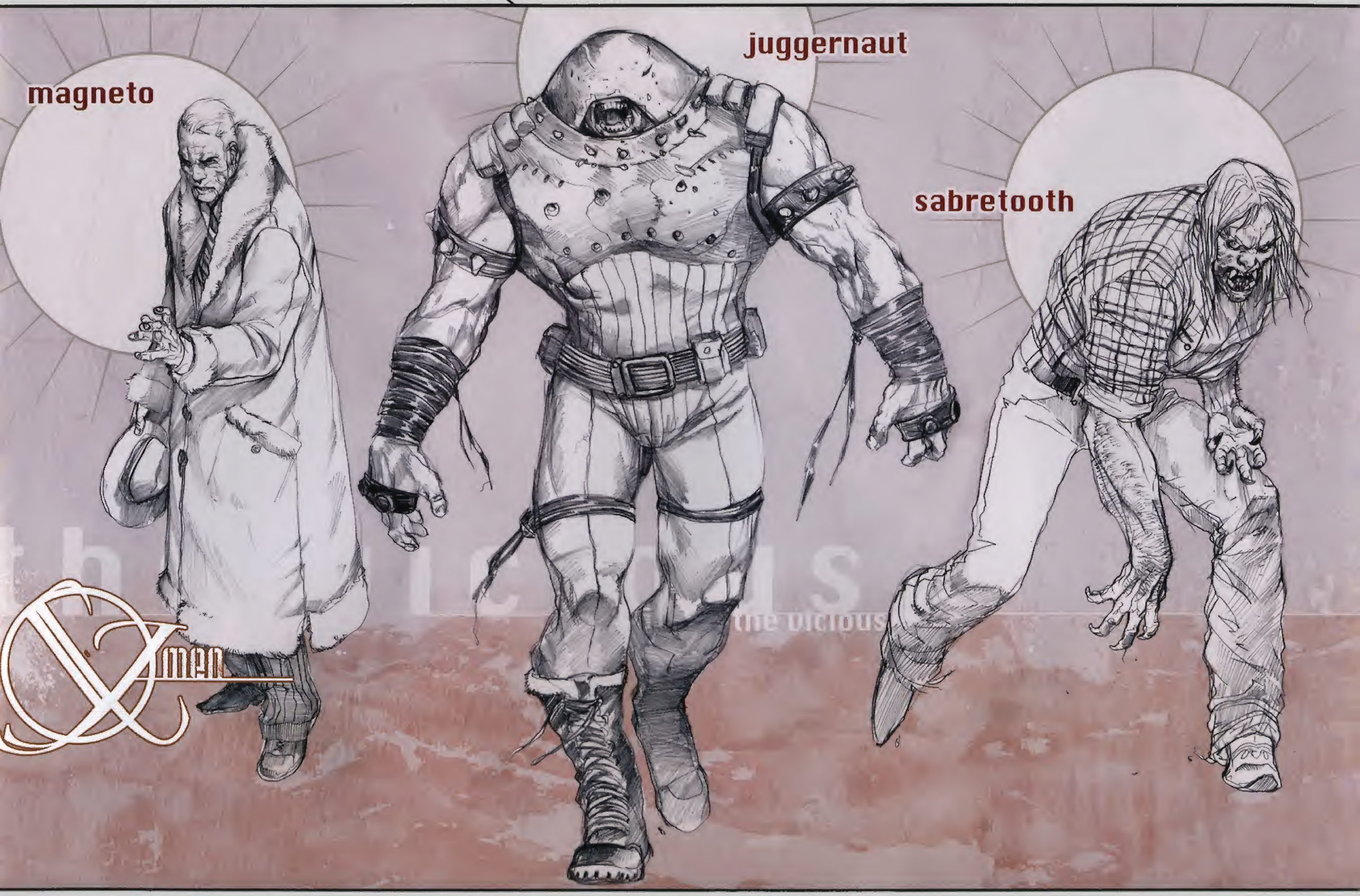
2 WITH AVIATOR GOGGLES AND TRENCH COAT (OPEN) PLUS WEAPON HOLSTER

2.1
AVIATOR GOGGLES WITH HAT COMBO

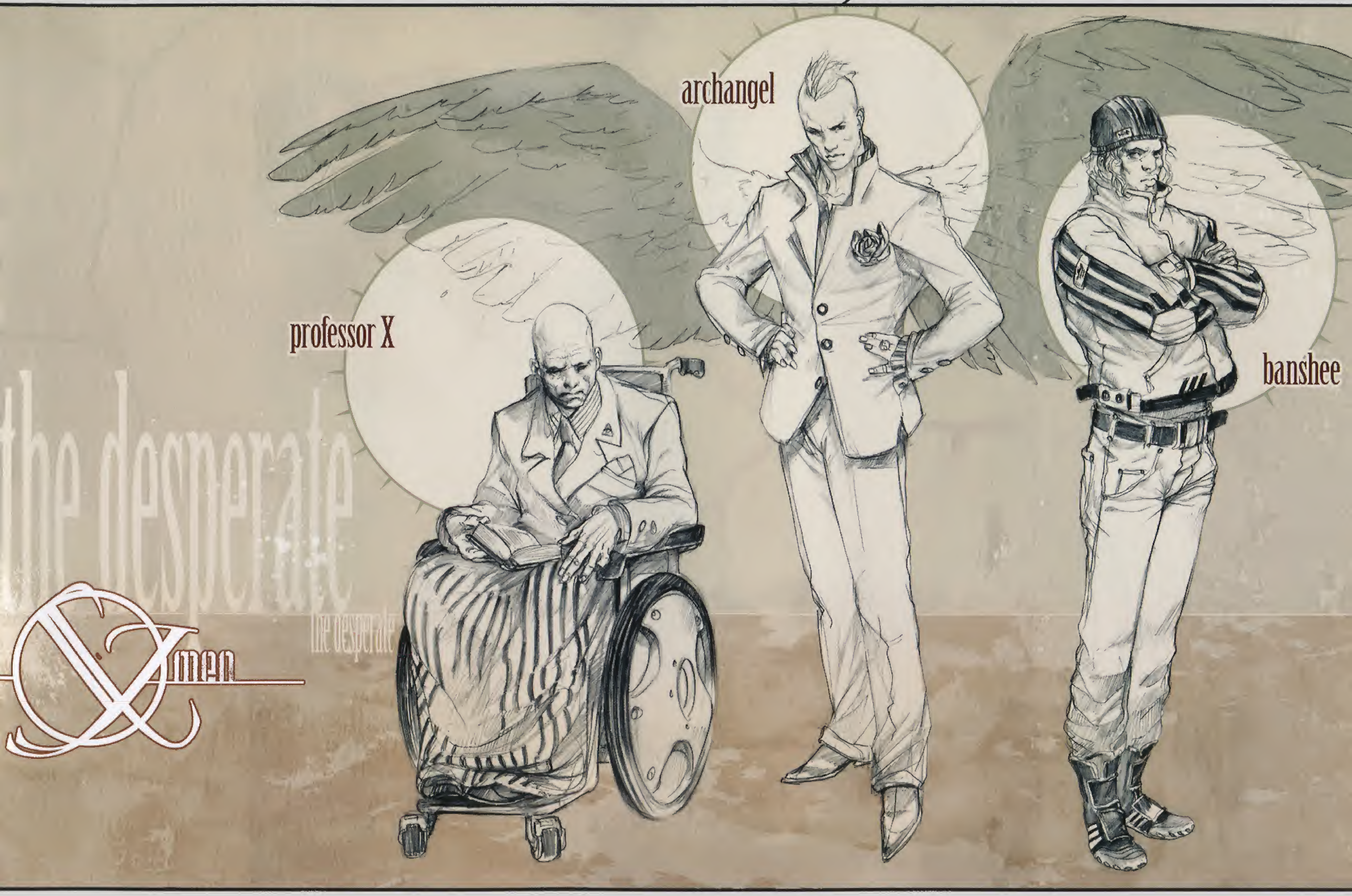
3 WITH TRENCH COAT (CLOSED) WEAPON HOLSTER (ON BELT) PLUS HAT

"The initial design was little more oriented toward the classic Spider-Man costume, which was basically the same cut but made out of leather. I liked that a lot more than the later ones that I did, because it followed my image of what a person in that time might do to make a costume – in taking the leather and seaming it together, the way the seams would be aligned it would, without any intention, resemble a spider web.

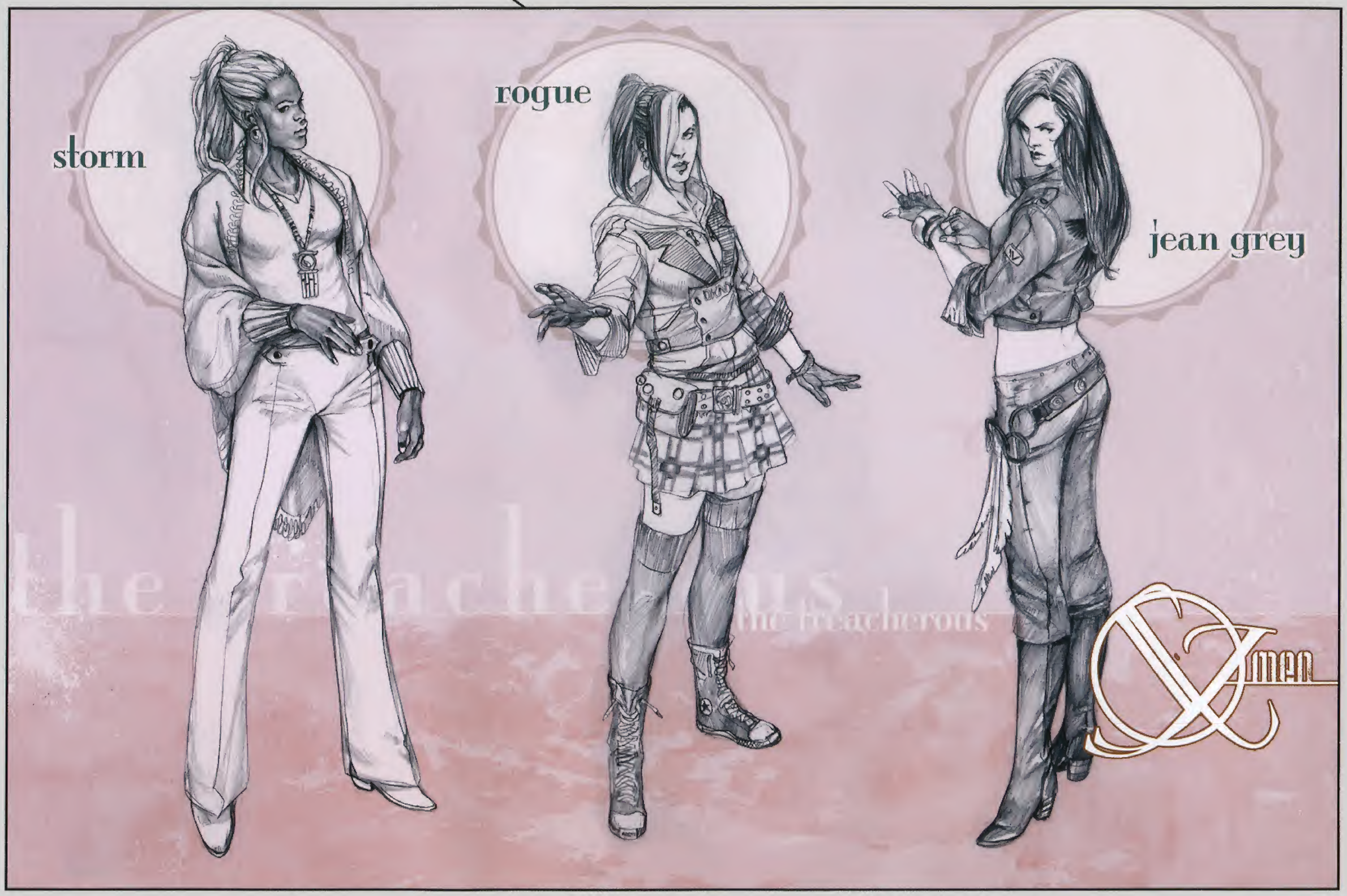
"However, they thought it key to remove the design from the contemporary Spider-Man look and really go for a different route, one that didn't involve webbing. Overall, it was a good editorial decision – not everything has to look reminiscent of the current state of things."



"These X-Men sketches came about while I was in Germany waiting for my visa to be renewed so I could return to the US to work at Massive Black. I was hanging out with an artist friend named Nic Klein, who would later do some covers for Marvel, and we were bored one night because we didn't have anything to do. Go out and drink? Stay home and watch a movie? As we were both artists, it happened that Nic challenged me to a drawing competition. The contest would be to see who could come up with the best redesign of an old-school Marvel villain. He took Green Goblin and I chose Sabretooth. It was such a dumb challenge, especially since Nick is a guy who loses attention very quickly. At half a sketch, he wandered off to do something different, while I sat there and finished my Sabretooth drawing. I liked what I had done so much I kept at it and by the time Nic came back, I had three additional characters drawn…"



"Since I was on vacation and didn't have anything else to do, I kept drawing over the next three days and had sheets of paper devoted to designs of eighteen X-Men, completely redesigned via semi-complicated back stories I had dreamed up for each of them. Further, I grouped them in three to make them compatible with each other. It was all a purely personal pursuit, just to see what I could do with them using all the experience I had gained as a professional concept artist. I hadn't read X-Men comics in years, was completely out of touch with their current comic book reality, and was only drawing on my memories of reading them as a child…"

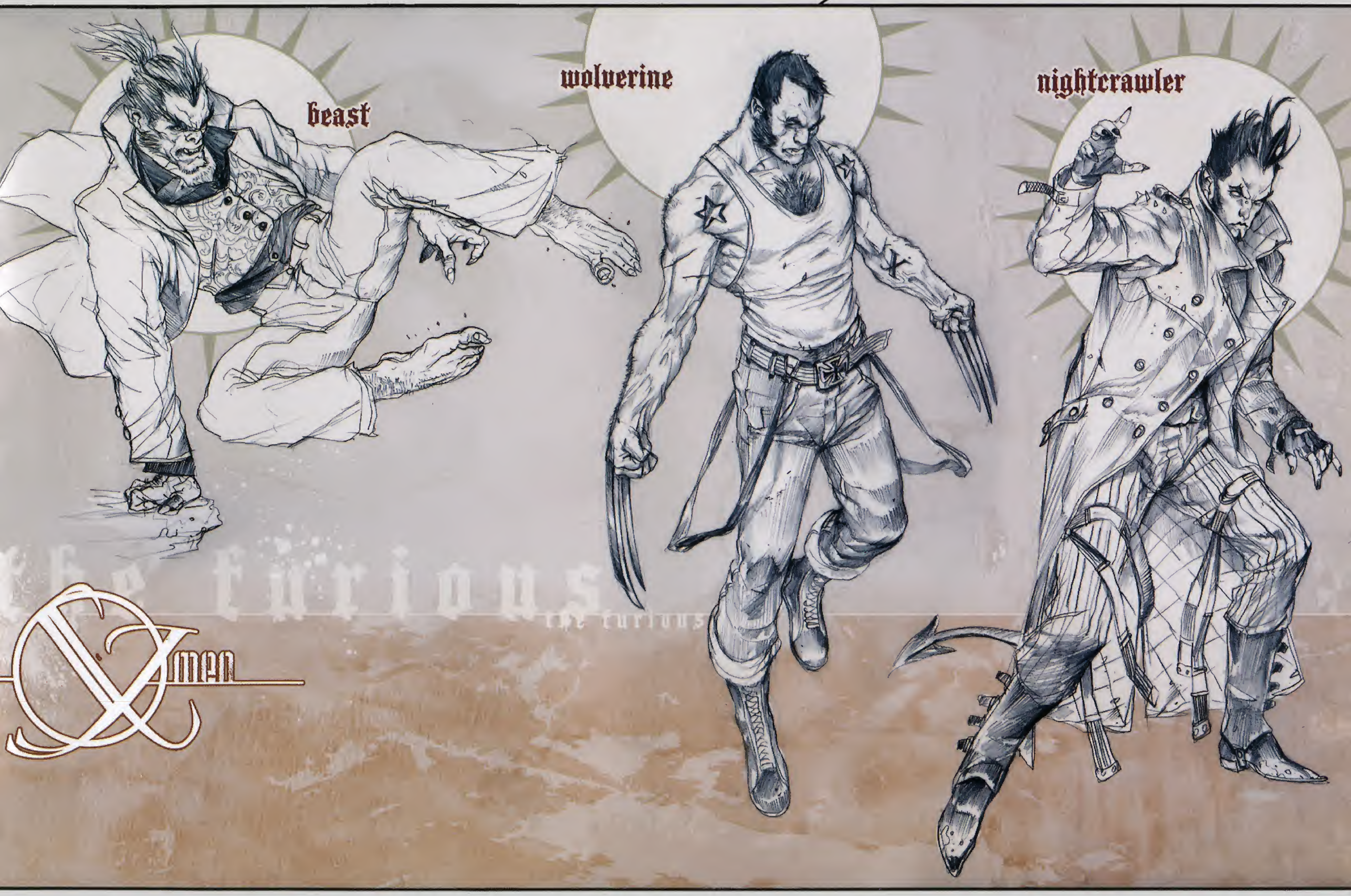


"I tried to group the agenda of three characters into one overarching, unifying theme. With the Treacherous, for example, I was thinking of making a group of X-Men women that are only interested in bringing Angel to the fall. In my narrative, they all shared a common agenda in terms of they had all fallen in love with Angel and been spurned by him. And because all three of them have huge egos, and they felt really destroyed by his betrayal, they banded together to plan how to eradicate Angel from their lives.

"I imagined Storm as a voodoo priestess, a weather magician – not a lightning-bolt throwing, flying, super heroine, but more like a dignified woman with a long line of ancestors going back to the Zulu tribe of Africa. She performs her weather magic on a very personal scale, and would never let a man into her life unless he had really conquered her heart. Angel was so seductive that she let him in, and then he ditched her and moved on.

"Rogue was always infatuated with Angel, but he never gave her a chance. And as it is if you're infatuated with someone, it all turns to rage at the point when you're not getting what you want out of it, if your expectations are too high.

"Jean Grey was tempted by Angel to cheat on her husband, Scott Summers, a relationship that was the first time she actually had been so close with somebody else, but because of Angel she let herself go, and she could never forgive herself afterwards for cheating. And so those three banded together as 'the treacherous,' plotting on how to destroy Angel's life…"

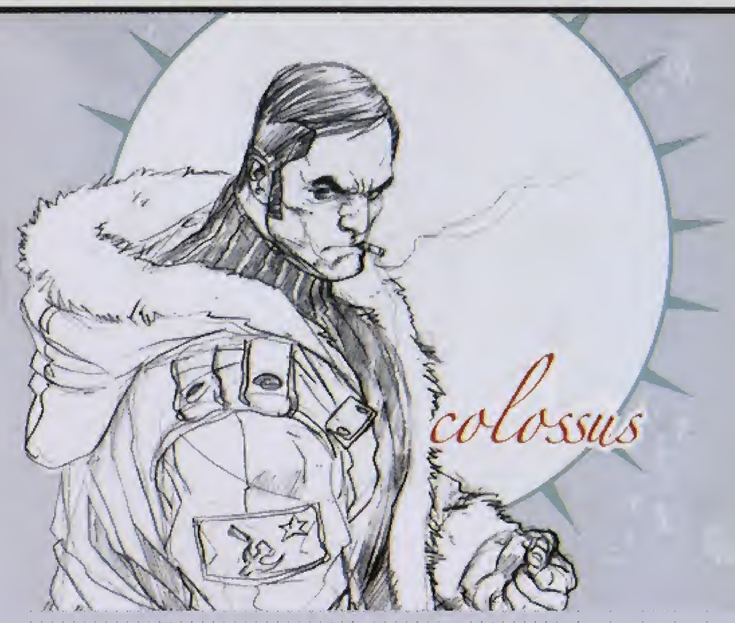


"These are all character motives that I came up with on the fly. My only plan when I started out was just to make the X-Men look more interesting, to take them out of their costumes and their world-saving agendas and give them the problems of everyday people. What would they look like, what would they be doing if there was no common enemy around? If they were just living their lives normally among human beings, with rent to pay, jobs to go to, down to earth relationships, and weren't all living together in a big mansion that was paid for by some millionaire. Reimagining the entire concept of what those characters are about – but still keeping them close to the core of what their powers represent – was what all the fun was about…"

"At the end of it, I posted them up on conceptart.org. There was a lot of love and praise for them, but there was also a significant amount of hate for them. The typical rants about raping someone's childhood with horrible ideas. I got all kinds of email – positive and negative – and there were people blogging about them, mostly talking about how awful the designs were. It must have been two weeks later, when I returned to San Francisco on a fresh visa, that I found a private message from Chris Allo in my forum inbox. He told me he was the talent manager at Marvel and he wanted to talk to me about the possibility of working with them and to please give him a call. I gave him a call that very day, and he offered me the gig to start working for Marvel…"

cyclops

gambit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ISBN 978-0-7851-3962-1
54999
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